

THE ARGOSY.

MAY 2, 1870.

BESSY RANE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

PART THE SECOND.

CHAPTER XIV.

OF WHAT WAS, AND OF WHAT MIGHT BE.

BESSY RANE sat at the large window of her dining-room in the coming twilight. Some twelve months had elapsed since her marriage, and summer was round again. Her work had dropped on her lap: it was that of stitching some wristbands for her husband: and she sat inhaling the fresh sweet scent of the garden flowers, and watching Jelly's movements in the room facing her—Mrs. Cumberland's. Jelly had a candle in her hand, apparently searching for something, for she was throwing its light and her own eyes into every hole and corner. Bessy stooped forward to pluck a sprig of sweet verberna, and sat on tranquilly.

At the table behind her sat Dr. Rane, writing as fast as the decreasing light would allow. Some unusual and peculiar symptoms had manifested themselves in a patient he had been recently attending, and he was making them and the case into a paper for a medical publication, in the hope that it would bring him back a remunerating guinea or two.

"Oliver, I am sure you can't see," said Bessy presently, looking round.

"It is almost blindman's holiday, dear. Will you ring for the lamp?"

Mrs. Rane rose. But, instead of ringing for the lamp, she went up to him, and put her hand on his shoulder persuasively.

"Take a quarter of an hour's rest, Oliver. You will find all the benefit of it: and it is not quite time to light the lamp. Let us take a stroll in the garden."

"You are obstructing what little light is left, Bessy ; standing between me and the window."

"Of course I am. I'm doing it on purpose. Come ! You ought to know a great deal better than I do that it is bad to try the eyes, sir. *Please, Oliver !*"

Yielding to her entreaties, he pushed the paper from him with a sigh of weariness, and they stepped from the window into the garden. Bessy passed her hand within his arm ; and, turning towards the more covert paths, they began to converse with one another in a semi-whisper.

Many a twilight half hour had they thus paced together of late, talking earnestly of what was and of what might be. The first year of their marriage had not been one of success in a pecuniary point of view : for Dr. Rane's practice improved not. He earned barely enough for their moderate wants. Bessy, the cash-keeper, had a difficulty in making both ends meet. But the fact was not known : never a syllable of it transpired from either of them. Dr. Rane was seen out and about a great deal, going to and fro among his patients : and the world did not suspect his returns were so poor.

The new surgeon, Seeley, had stepped into all Mr. Alexander's practice, and was flourishing. Dr. Rane's, as before, was chiefly confined to the lower classes, especially those belonging to the North Works : and, from certain circumstances, these men were not so full of funds as they had been, and consequently not so well able to pay him. That Dr. Rane was bitterly mortified at not getting on better, for his wife's sake as well as his own, could not be mistaken. Bessy preached of hope cheerfully ; of a bright future in store yet ; but he had lost faith in it.

It seemed to Dr. Rane that everything was a failure. The medical book he had been engaged upon in persevering industry at the time of his marriage, from which he had anticipated great things both in fame and fortune, had not met with success. He had succeeded in getting it published ; but as yet there were no returns. He had sacrificed a sum of money towards its publication : not a very large sum, it's true, but larger than they could afford, and nobody but themselves knew how it had crippled them. Bessy said it would come back some day with plenty of interest ; they had only to keep up a good heart and live frugally.

Poor Bessy herself had one grief that she never spoke of, even to him—the lack of offspring. There had been no prospect of it whatever : and she so loved children ! As week after week, month after month went by without bringing sign, her disappointment was very keen. She was beginning to get a little reconciled to it now : and grew only the more devoted to her husband.

Mrs. Rane was an excellent manager in the household, spending the smallest fraction that she could, consistent with comfort. It had not

yet come to the lack of *that*. At the turn of the previous winter, old Phillis became ill and had to leave; and Bessy had since kept only Molly Green. By a fortunate chance Molly understood cooking; she had grown to be a really excellent servant. At the small rate of expense they lived at now, Dr. Rane might perhaps have managed to continue to meet it while he waited patiently for better luck: but he did not intend to do anything of the kind. His only anxiety was to remove to another place, as far away as might be from Dallory Ham.

Whether this thirst for migration would have arisen had his practice been successful, cannot be told. We can only relate things as they were. With the disappointment—and other matters—lying upon him, the getting away from Dallory had grown into a wild, burning desire, that never quitted him by night or by day. That one fatal mistake of his life seemed to hang over him like a curse. It's true that when he penned the letter so disastrous in its result, he had no more intention in his heart of slaying or killing than had the paper he wrote on; he had only thought of putting Alexander into disfavour at Dallory Hall: but—it had turned out as it had turned out; and Dr. Rane felt that he had a life to answer for. He might have borne this: and at any rate his running away from Dallory would neither lessen the heart's burden nor add to it: but what he could not bear, was the prospect of detection. Not a day passed, but he saw somebody or another whose face tacitly reminded him that such discovery might take place. He felt sure that Mrs. Gass suspected him still of having written the letter; he knew that his mother doubted it; he picked up a half suspicion of Jelly; he had more than half a one of Richard North: and how many others there might be, he knew not. Ever since the time when he returned from his marriage trip, there had been an involuntary constraint in Richard's manner to him; and which he felt sure was not his own fancy. As to Jelly, the way he sometimes caught her green eyes observing him, was enough to give a nervous man the shivers: which Dr. Rane was not. How he could have committed the fatal mistake of putting that copy—or semi-copy—of the miserable letter into his pocket-book, he never knew. He had tried his writing and his words on two or three pieces of paper, but he surely thought he had torn all up and burnt the pieces. Over and over again, looking back upon his carelessness, he said to himself that it was Fate. Not carelessness, in one sense of the word. Carelessness if you will, but a carelessness that he could not go from in the arbitrary dominion of Fate. Fate had been controlling him with her iron hand, to bring his crime home to him; and he could not escape it. Whatever it might have been, however, Fate, or want of caution, it had led to his being a suspected man by some few around him; and, continue to live amidst them, he would not. Dr. Rane was a proud-natured man, liking in an especial degree to stand well in the estimation of his fellow creatures; to have such a

degradation, as this, brought publicly home to him would go well nigh to kill him with shame. Rather than face it, he would have run away to the remotest quarter of the habitable globe.

And he had quite imbued Bessy with the wish for change. She but thought as he thought. Never suspecting the true cause of his wish to get away and establish himself elsewhere, she only saw how real it was. Of this they talked, night after night, pacing the garden paths. "There seems to have been a spell of ill-luck attending me ever since I settled in this place," he would say to her; "and I know it won't be lifted off while I stop." He was saying it on this very night.

"I hate the place, Bessy," he observed, looking up at the bright evening star that began to show itself in the clear blue sky. "But for my mother, and you, I should never have stayed in it. I wish I had the money to buy a practice elsewhere. As it is, I must establish one."

"Yes," acquiesced Bessy. "But where? The great thing is—what other place to fix upon."

Of course that was the chief thing. Dr. Rane looked down and kept silence, pondering various matters in his mind. He thought it had better be London. A friend of his, one Dr. Jones, who had been a fellow-student in their student-days, was doing a large practice as a medical man in the neighbourhood of New York: he wanted assistance, and had proposed to Dr. Rane to go over and join him. Nothing in the world would Dr. Rane have liked better; and Bessy was willing to go where he went, even to quit her native land for good; but Dr. Jones did not offer this without an equivalent, and the terms he named to be paid down, £500, were entirely beyond the reach of Oliver Rane. So he supposed it must be London. With the two hundred pounds that he hoped to get for the good-will of his own practice in Dallory Ham—at this very moment he was trying to negotiate with a gentleman for it in private—he should set-up in London, or else purchase a small share in an established practice. Anything, anywhere to get away, and to leave the nightmare of daily-dreaded discovery behind him!

"Once we are away from this place, Bessy, we shall get on. I feel sure of it. You won't long have to live like a hermit, from dread of the cost of entertaining company, or to look at every sixpence before you lay it out."

"I don't mind it, Oliver. You know how sorry I should be if you thought of giving up our home here for my sake."

"But I don't; it's for my own as well," he hastily added. "You can't realize what it is, Bessy, for a clever medical man—and I am that—to be beaten back ever into obscurity; to find no field for his talents; to watch others of his generation rise into note and usefulness. I have not got on here; Madam has schemed to prevent it. Why she should have pushed on Alexander; why she should push Seeley; not for their sakes, but to oppose me, I have never been able to imagine. Unless

it was that my mother, when Fanny Gass, and Mr. North were intimate as brother and sister in early life."

"And Madam despises the Gass family, and ours equally. It was a black-letter day for us all when papa married her."

"It is no reason why she should have set her face against *me*. It has been a fatal blight on me: worse than you and the world think for, Bessy."

"I am sure you must have felt it so," murmured Bessy. "And she would have stopped our marriage if she could."

"Whoever succeeds me here will speedily make a good practice of it. You'll see. She has kept me from doing it. There's one blessed thing—her evil influence cannot follow us elsewhere."

"I should like to become rich and have a large house, and get poor papa to live with us," said Bessy hopefully. "Madam is worrying him into his grave with her cruel temper. Oh, Oliver, I should like him to come!"

"I'm sure I'd not object," replied Dr. Rane good-naturedly. "How they will keep up the expenses at Dallory Hall if this strike be prolonged, I cannot think. Serve Madam right!"

"Do you hear much of the trouble, Oliver?"

"Much of it! Why, I hear nothing else. The men are fools. They'll cut their own throats as sure as a gun. Your brother Richard sees it coming."

"Sees what?" asked Bessy, not exactly understanding.

"Ruin," emphatically replied Dr. Rane. "The men will play at bo-peep with reason until the trade has left them. Fools! Fools!"

"It's not the poor men, Oliver. I have lived amongst them, some of them at any rate, since I was a child, and I don't like to hear them blamed. It is that they are misled. Misled by the trades unions."

"Nonsense!" replied Dr. Rane. "A man who has his living to earn ought not to allow himself to be misled. There's his work to hand; let him do it. A body of would-be autocrats might come down on me and say 'Oliver Rane, we want you to join our society: which forbids doctors to visit patients except under its own rules and regulations.' Suppose I listened to them?—and stayed at home, and let Seeley, or anybody else who would, snap up my practice, and awoke presently to find my means of living irrevocably gone?—nothing left for me but the workhouse? Should I deserve pity? Certainly not."

Bessy laughed a little. They were going in, and she—still keeping her hand within his arm—coaxed him yet for another minute's recreation into the drawing-room. Sitting down to the piano in the fading-light—the piano that Richard had given her—she began a song that her husband was fond of, "O Bay of Dublin." That sweet song, set to the air of the "Groves of Blarney," by the late Lady Dufferin. Bessy's voice was weak and of no compass, but true and rather

sweet; and she had that by no means common gift of rendering every word as distinctly heard as though it were spoken: so that her singing was pleasant to listen to. Her husband liked it. He leaned against the window-frame, now as she sang, in a deep reverie, gazing out on Dallory Ham, and at the man lighting the road-side lamps. Dr. Rane never heard this song but he wished he was the emigrant singing it, with some wide ocean flowing between him and home.

"What's this, I wonder?"

Some woman, whom he did not recognise, had turned in at his gate and was ringing the door-bell. Dr. Rane found he was called out to a patient: one of the profitless people, as usual.

"Piersons' want me, Bessy," he looked into the room to say. "The man's worse. I shall not be long."

And Bessy rose when she heard the street-door closed.

Taking a clean duster from a drawer, she carefully passed it over the keys before closing her piano for the night. Very much did Bessy cherish her drawing-room and its furniture. They did not use it much: not from fear of spoiling it, but because the other room with its large bay window seemed the most cheery; and people feel more at ease in the room they commonly sit in. Bessy took pride in her house as though it had been one of the grandest in all Dallory: happy as a queen in it, felt she. Stepping lightly over the drawing-room carpet—fresh as the day when it came out of Turtle's warehouse—touching, with a gentle finger, some pretty thing or other on the tables as she passed, she opened the door and called to the servant.

"Molly, it is time these shutters were shut."

Molly Green, in a bit of a cap tilted on her hair behind, and a white muslin-apron, came out of the kitchen hard by. Molly liked to be as smart as the best of them, although she had the whole work to do. Which whole was not very much, when aided by her mistress's help and good-management.

"You had better light the hall-lamp," added Mrs. Rane, as she went up stairs.

It was tolerably light yet. Bessy often did what she was about to do—namely, draw down the window blinds; it saved Molly the trouble. The wide landing was less bare than it used to be; at the time of Dr. Rane's marriage he had covered it with some green drugget, and put a chair and a book-shelf there. It still looked too large, still presented a contrast with the luxuriously furnished landing of Mrs. Cumberland's opposite, especially when the two wide windows happened to be open; but Bessy thought her own good enough. Of the two back-rooms, one had been furnished as a spare bed-chamber; the other had not much in it beside Bessy's boxes that had come from the Hall. Richard had spoken kindly to her about this last chamber. "Should any contingency arise; sickness, or else; that you

should require its use, Bessy," he said, "and Rane not find it quite convenient to spare money for furniture, let me know, and I'll do it for you." She had thanked him gratefully : but the contingency had not come yet.

Into this back room first went Bessy, passed by her boxes, closed the window, and drew the white blind down. From thence into the chamber by its side—a pretty room, with chintz curtains to the window and the Arabian bed. Dr. Rane was very particular about having plenty of air in his house, and would have every window open all day long. Next, Bessy crossed the landing back again to her own chamber. She had to pass through the drab room (as may be remembered) to get to it. The drab room was just in the same state that it used to be ; its floor bare, Dr. Rane's glass-jars and other articles used in chemistry lying on one side it. Formerly they were strewed about any where : under Bessy's neat rule, they were gathered together into a small space. Sometimes Bessy thought she should like to make this her own sitting and work-room : its window looked to the fields beyond Dallory Ham. Often, when she first came to the house, she would softly say to her secret heart, "What a nice day-nursery it would make !" She had left off saying it now.

Taking some work from a drawer in her own room, which was what she went up for—for she knew that Oliver would tell her to leave off if she attempted to stitch the wristbands by candle-light—she stood for a minute at the window and saw some gentleman, whom she did not recognise, turn out of Mr. Seeley's, and go towards Dallory.

"A fresh patient," she thought to herself, with a sigh very like envy. "He gets them all. I wish a few would come to Oliver."

As she watched the stranger up the road, something in his height and make put her in sudden mind of her dead brother, Edmund. All her thoughts went back to the unhappy time of his death, and to the letter that had led to it.

"It's very good of Oliver to comfort me, saying he could not in any case have lived long—and I suppose it was so," murmured Bessy ; "but that does not make it any the less shocking. He was killed. Cut off without warning by that anonymous, wicked letter. And I don't believe the writer will be ever traced now : even Richard seems to have cooled in the pursuit, since he discovered it was not the man he had suspected."

Close upon the return of Dr. and Mrs. Rane after their marriage, the tall thin stranger who had been seen with Timothy Wilks the night before the anonymous letter was sent, and whom Richard North and others fully believed to have been the writer, was discovered. It proved to be a poor artist, travelling the country to take sketches—who was sometimes rather too fond of being a boon companion with whatever company he might happen to fall into. Hovering here for some days,

hovering there, all in pursuit of his calling, he at length made his head quarters at Whitborough. Hearing he was suspected, he came voluntarily forward, and convinced Richard North that he at least had had nothing to do with the letter. Richard's answer was, that he fully believed him. And perhaps it was Richard North's manner at this time, coupled with a remark he made to the effect that "it might be better to allow all speculation on the point to rest," that first gave Dr. Rane the idea of Richard's suspicion of himself. Things had been left at rest since : and even Bessy, as we see, thought her brother was growing cool.

Turning from the window with a sigh, given to the memory of her dead brother, she passed through the ante-room to the landing on her way down stairs. Mrs. Cumberland's landing opposite gave forth a brilliant light as usual—for that lady liked to burn plenty of lamps in her hall and staircases—and Ann, the housemaid, was drawing down the window blind. Mrs. Rane's window had never had a blind.

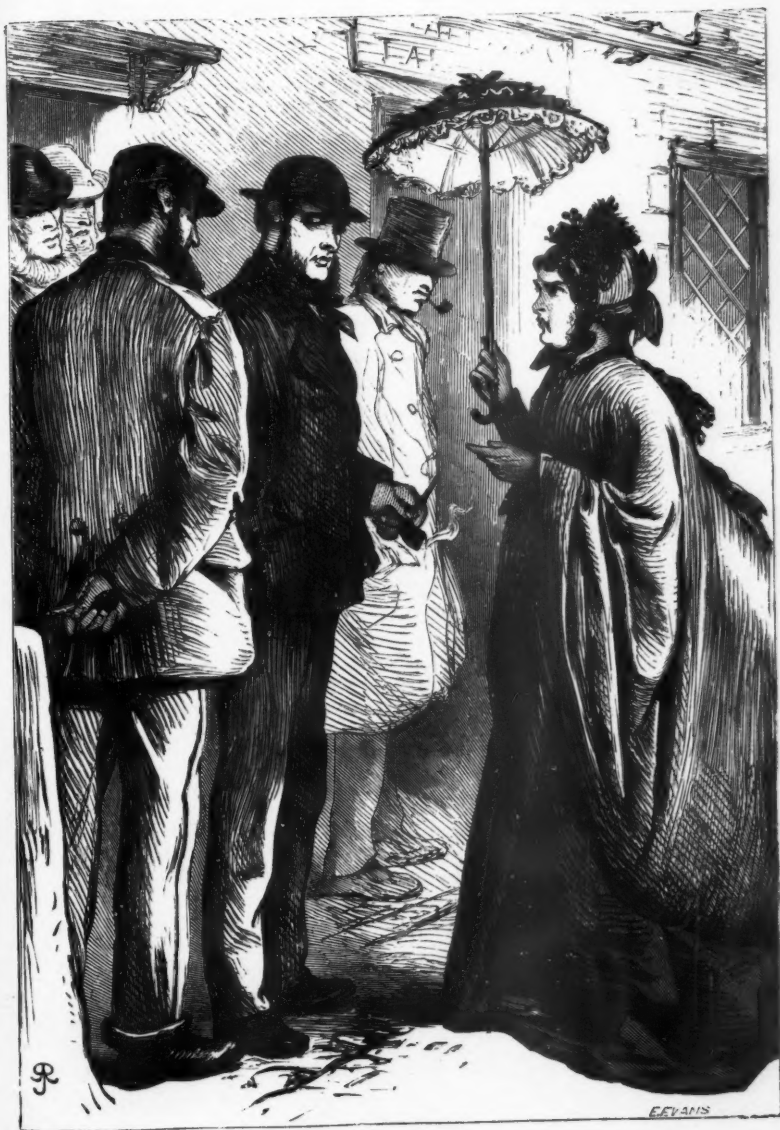
Molly Green was taking the supper-tray into the dining-room when she got down. Bessy hovered about it, seeing that things were as her husband liked them. She put his slippers ready, she drew his arm-chair forward ; ever solicitous for his comfort. To wait on him and make things pleasant for him was the great happiness of her life. After that she sat down and worked by lamp-light, awaiting his return.

While Dr. Rane, walking forth to see his patient and walking home again, was buried in an unpleasant reverie, like a man in a dream. That one dreadful mistake lay always with heavier weight upon him at the solitary evening hour. Now and again, he would almost fancy he should see Edmund North looking out at him from the road-side hedges or behind trees. At any sacrifice he must get away from the place, and then perhaps a chance of peace might come : at least from this ever-haunting dread of discovery. He would willingly give the half of his remaining life, to undo that past dark night's work.

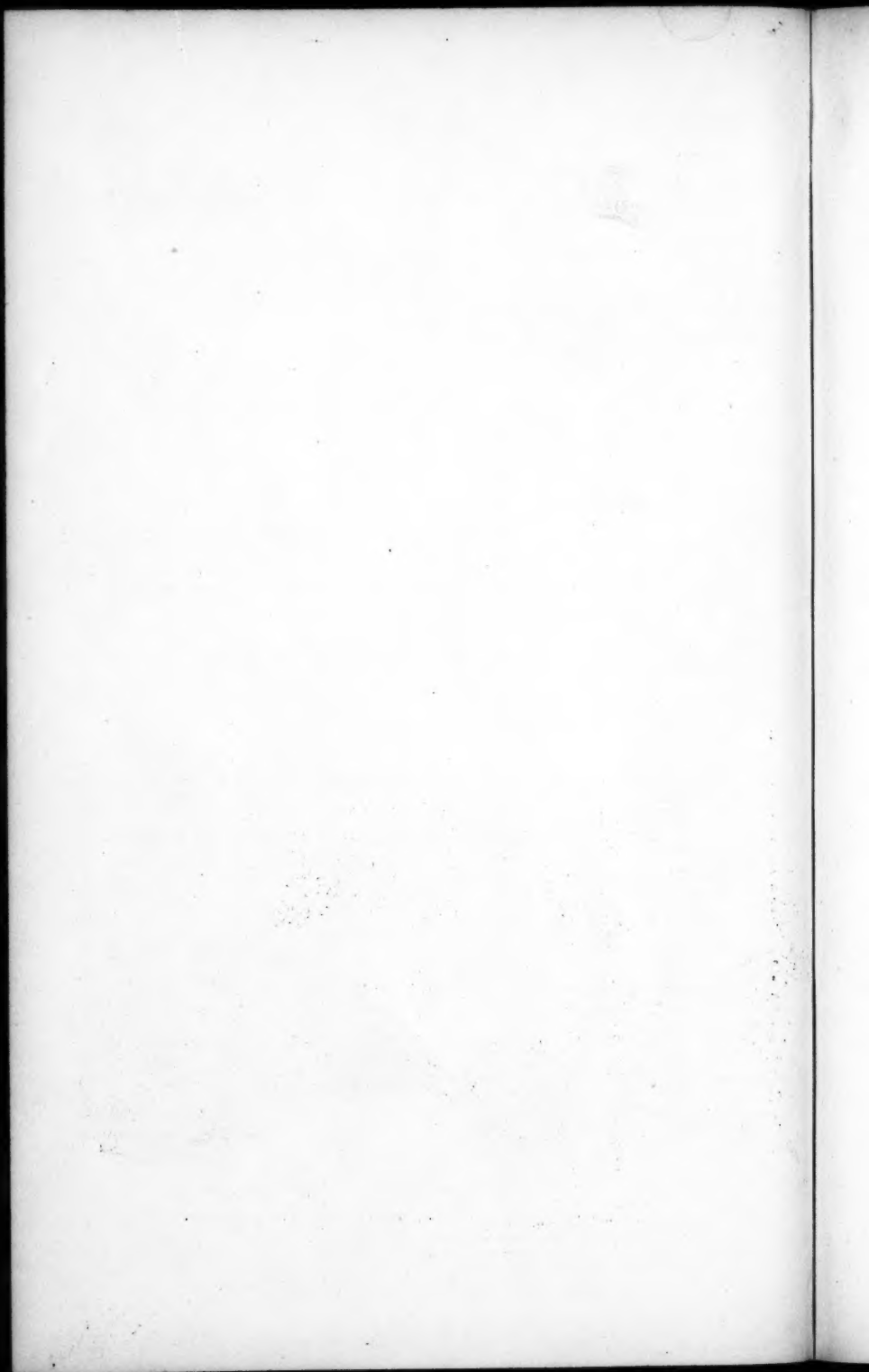
CHAPTER XV.

MRS. GASS AMID THE WORKMEN.

THERE was trouble amidst the Dallory work-people. It had been looming for some time before it came. No works throughout the kingdom had been more successfully carried on than the North Works. The men were well paid ; peace and satisfaction had always reigned between them and their employers. But when some delegates, or emissaries, or whatever they may please to call themselves, arrived stealthily at Dallory from the Trades Unions, and took up their stealthy abode in the place, and whispered their stealthy whispers into the ears of the men, the peace was over.



"How much longer do you intend to lead the lives of gentfolk?"



It matters not to trace the working of these insidious whispers, or how the poison spread. Others have done it far more effectively and to the purpose than I could. Sufficient to say that the Dallory work-people caught the infection prevailing amidst other bodies of men—which the public, to its cost, has of late years known too much of—and they joined the ranks of the disaffected. First there had been doubt, and misgiving, and wavering; then agitation; then dissatisfaction; then parleying with their master, Richard North; then *demands* to be paid more and do less work. In vain Richard, with his strong good sense, argued and reasoned; showing them, in all kindness, not in anger, how mistaken was the course they were entering on, and what must come of it. They listened to him with respect, for he was liked and esteemed; but they would not give-in a jot. It had been told privately to Richard that much argument and holding-out had been carried on with the Trades Union emissaries, some of whom were ever hovering over Dallory like birds of prey: the workmen wanting to insist on the sound sense of Richard North's view of things, the others speciously disproving. But it came to nothing. The workmen yielded to their despotic lords and rulers just as submissively as others have done, and Richard's words were set at nought. They were like so many tame sheep following blindly their leader. The agitation, beginning about the time of Bessy North's marriage, continued for many months; it then came to an issue, and for several weeks now the works had been shut up.

For the men had struck. North and Gass had valuable contracts on hand, and they could not be completed. Unless matters took a turn speedily, masters and men would alike be ruined. The ruin of the first involved that of the last.

Mrs. Gass took things more equably than Richard North. In one sense she had less cause to take them otherwise. Her prosperity did not depend on the works. A large sum of hers was certainly invested in them; but a larger one was in other securities safe and sure. If the works and their capital went to nought, the only difference it would make to Mrs. Gass was, that she should have so much the less money to leave behind her when she died. In this sense therefore Mrs. Gass could take things calmly: but in regard to the men's conduct she was far more out-spoken and severe than Richard.

Dallory presented a curious scene. In former days, during work time not an idle man was to be met: the village street, the various outlets, had looked almost deserted, save for the playing children. Now the narrow thoroughfares were blocked up with groups of men; talking seriously, or chaffing with each other, as might be; most of them smoking and spitting, and all looking utterly sick of the wearily-passing hours. Work does not tire a man—or woman either—half as much as idleness.

At first the holiday was agreeable from its novelty; the six days

were Sunday as well as the seventh; and the men and women lived in clover. Not one family in twenty had been sufficiently provident to put by money for a rainy day, good though their wages had been; but the trades unions took care of their new protégés, and supplied them with funds. But—as the weeks went on, and Richard North gave no sign of relenting—that is, of acceding to his men's demands by taking them on again at their terms—the funds did not come in so liberally. Husbands, not accustomed to be stinted; wives, not knowing how to make sixpence suffice for a shilling, might be excused if they felt a little put out; and they began to take things to the pawnbroker's. Mr. Ducket, the respectable functionary who presided over the interests of the three gilt balls at Dallory, rubbed his hands complacently as he took the articles in. Being gifted with a long sharp nose, his scent was keen, and he smelt the good time coming.

One day in passing the shop, Mrs. Gass saw three women in it. She walked in herself; and, with scant ceremony, demanded what they were pledging. The women slunk away, hiding their property under their aprons, and leaving their errand to be completed another time. That Mrs. Gass or their master, Richard North, should see them at this work, brought humiliation to their minds, and shame to their cheeks. Richard North and Mrs. Gass had both told them (to their intense disbelief) that it would come to this: and to be detected in the actual fact of pledging, seemed very like a tacit defeat.

"So you've began, have you, Ducket?" commenced Mrs. Gass.

"Began what, ma'am?" asked Ducket; a little, middle-aged man with watery eyes and weak hair: always deferent in manner to the wealthy and fine Mrs. Gass.

"Began what! Why, the spouting. I told 'em all they'd come to the pawn-shop."

"It's them that have began the spouting, ma'am; not me."

"Where do you suppose it will end, Ducket?"

Ducket shook his head meekly, intimating that he couldn't suppose. He was naturally meek in disposition, and the brow-beating he habitually underwent in the course of business from his customers of the fairer sex, had tended to subdue his spirit and make him mild as honey.

"It 'll just end in their pawning every earthly thing their homes has got inside of 'em, leaving them to the four naked walls," said Mrs. Gass. "And the next move 'll be into the work 'us."

In the presence of Mrs. Gass, Ducket did not choose to show any sense of latent profit this wholesale pledging might bring to him. On the contrary, he affected to see nothing but gloom.

"A nice prospect for us rate-payers, ma'am, that 'ud be! Taxes be heavy enough, as it is, in Dallory parish, without having all these workmen and their families throw'd on us to eat us up."

"If the taxes was of my mind, Ducket, they'd let the men starve, rather than help 'em. When strong, able-bodied artizans have got plenty of work to do, and won't do it, it's time for them to be taught a lesson. As sure as you be standing on that side your counter, and me on this, them misbeguided men will come to want a mouldy crust."

"Well, I'd not wish 'em as bad as that," said Ducket; who, apart from the hardness induced by his trade, was rather soft-hearted. "Perhaps Mr. Richard North 'll give in."

"Mr. Richard North give in!" echoed Mrs. Gass. "Don't you upset your brains with perhapsing that, Ducket. Who ought to give in—looking at the rights and wrongs of the question—North and Gass; or the men? Tell me that."

"Well, I think the men are wrong," acknowledged the pawnbroker, smoothing down his coarse white linen apron. "And foolish too."

Mrs. Gass nodded several times, a significant look on her pleasant-natured face. She wore a topknot of white feathers, and they bowed majestically with the movement.

"Maybe they'll live to see it, too. They will, unless their senses come back to 'em pretty quick. Look here, Ducket: what I was about to say is this—Don't you be too free to take their traps in."

Ducket's face assumed a rueful cast. But Mrs. Gass was looking at him; evidently waiting for an answer.

"I don't see any way for refusing of things when they be brought to me, Mrs. Gass, ma'am. The women 'ud only go off to Whitborough and pledge 'em there."

"Then they should go—for me."

"Yes, ma'am," rejoined the man, not knowing what else to say.

"I'm not particular squeamish, Ducket: trade's trade; and a pawnbroker must live as well as other people. I don't say but what the money he lends does sometimes a world of good to them that's got no other help to turn to—and, may be, through no fault of their own, poor things. But when it comes to the dismantling of homes by the dozen and the score, and the leaving of families as naked and destitute as ever they were when they came into this blessed world, that's different. And I'd not like to have it on my conscience, Ducket, though I was ten pawnbrokers."

Mrs. Gass quitted the shop with the last words, leaving Ducket to digest them. In passing North Inlet, she saw a group of the disaffected collected together, and turned out of her way to speak to them. Mrs. Gass was entirely at home, so to say, with every one of the men at the works; more so perhaps than a lady of better birth and breeding could ever have been. She found fault with them and commented on their failings as familiarly as though she had been one of themselves. Of the whole body of workpeople, not more than three or four had consistently raised their voices against the strike. These few would

willingly have gone to work again, and thought it a terrible hardship that they could not: but of course the refusal of the many to return practically closed the gates on all. Richard North could not keep his business going with only half a dozen pairs of hands in it.

"Well," began Mrs. Gass, "what's the time o' day with you men?"

The men parted at the address, and touched their caps. The "time o' day" meant, as they knew, anything but the literal question.

"How much longer do you intend to lead the lives of gentlefolk?"

"It's what we was a talking on, ma'am—how much longer Mr. Richard North 'll keep the gates closed again us," returned one, whose name was Webb, speaking boldly but respectfully.

"Don't you put the saddle on the wrong horse, Webb; I told you that the other day. Mr. Richard North didn't close the gates again you: you closed 'em again yourselves by walking out. He'd open them to you to-morrow, and be glad to do it."

"Yes, ma'am; but on the old terms," debated the man, looking obstinately at Mrs. Gass.

"What have you to say again the old terms?" demanded that lady of the men collectively. "Haven't they kept you and your families in comfort for years and years? Where was your grumblings then?—I heard of none."

"But things is changed," said Webb.

"Not a bit of it," retorted Mrs. Gass. "It's you men that have changed; not the things. I'll put a question to you, Webb—to all of you—and it won't do you no harm to answer it. If these trade union men had never come among you with their persuasions and their doctrines, should you, or should you not, have been at your work now in content and peace? Come, Webb; be honest, and say."

"I suppose so," confessed Webb.

"You know so," corrected Mrs. Gass. "It is as Mr. Richard said the other day to me—the men are led away by a chimera. Which means a false fancy, Webb; a sham. There's the place"—pointing in the direction of the works, "and there's your work, waiting for you to do it. Mr. Richard will give you the same wages that he has always gave; you say you won't go to work unless he gives more: which he can't afford to do. And there it rests: you and him and the business all at a standstill."

"And likely to be at a standstill, ma'am," returned Webb, but always respectfully.

"Very well; let's take it at that," said Mrs. Gass, with equanimity. "Let's take it that it *lasts*, this state o' things. What's to come of it?"

Webb, an intelligent man and superior workman, looked out straight before him thoughtfully, as if seeking a solution to the question. Mrs. Gass, finding he did not answer, resumed:

"If the Trades Unions can find you permanent in food, and drink, and clothes, and firing, well and good. Let 'em do it: there'd be no more to say. But if they can't?"

"They undertake to keep us as long as the masters hold out."

"And the money—where's it had from?"

"Subscribed. All the working bodies throughout the United Kingdom subscribe to support the Trades Unions, ma'am."

"I heard," said Mrs. Gass, "that you were not getting quite as liberal a keep from the Trades Unions as they gave you to begin upon."

"That's true," interrupted one named Foster, who very much resented the shortening of the supplies.

Mrs. Gass gave a toss to her lace parasol. "I heard, too—I've seen, for the matter of that—that your wives had begun to spout their spare crockery," said she. "What 'll you do when the allowance gets less and less till it comes to nothing, and *all* your things is at the pawnshop?"

One or two of them laughed slightly. Not at her figures of speech—the homely language was their own—but at the improbability of the picture she called up. It was a state of affairs not possible to arise, they answered, while they had the Trades Unions at their backs.

"Isn't it," said Mrs. Gass. "Them that live longest 'll see most. There's strikes agate all over the country. You know that, my men."

Of course the men knew it. But for the nearly universal example set by others, they might never have struck themselves.

"Very good," said Mrs. Gass. "Now look you here. You can see out before you just as well as I can, you men; you've got your senses as sharp as I've got mine. When the whole country, pretty nigh, gets on the strike, where are the subscriptions to come from for the Trades Unions? Don't it stand to common reason that there'll be nobody to pay 'em? Who'll keep you then?"

It was the very thing wanted—that all the country should be on strike; for then the masters must give in, was the reply given. And then the men stood their ground and looked at her.

Mrs. Gass shook her head; the feathers waved. She supposed it must be as Richard North had said—that the men in their prejudice really could not foresee what might be looming in the future.

"It seems no good my talking," she resumed; "I've said it before. If you don't come to repent, my name's not Mary Gass. I'm far from wishing it; goodness knows that; and I shall be heart-sick sorry for your wives and children when the misery comes upon 'em. Not for *you*; because you are bringing it on deliberate."

"Ma'am, we don't doubt your good wishes for us and our families generally," spoke Webb. "But, if you'll please excuse my saying of it, you stand in the shoes of a master, and naturally look on with the masters' sight. Your interests lie that way, ours this, and they be dead opposed to each other."

"Well, now, I'll just say something," cried Mrs. Gass. "As far as my own interest goes, I don't care a jot whether the works go on again or whether they stand still for ever. I've got as much money as will last me my time; if every pound that's locked up in the works is lost, it'll make no sort of difference to me, or my home, or my comforts—and you ought to know this of yourselves. I shall have as much to leave behind me too, as I care to leave. But, if you come to talk of interests, I tell you whose I do think of, more than I do of mine—and that's yours and Mr. Richard North's. I am as easy on the matter, on my own score, as a body can be; but I'm not on yours or his."

It was spoken with single-minded earnestness. In fact Mrs. Gass was incapable of attempting deceit or sophistry—and the men knew it. But they thought that, in spite of her honesty, she could but be prejudiced for the opposition cause; and consequently her words held no more weight with them than the idle wind.

"Well, I'm off," said Mrs. Gass. "I hope with all my heart that your senses will come to you. And I say it for your sakes."

"They've not left us—that we knows on," grumbled a man in a suppressed and half-insolent tone, as if he were dissatisfied with things in general.

"I hear you, Jack Allen. If you men think you know your own business best, you must follow it," concluded Mrs. Gass. "The old saying runs, A wilful man must have his way. One thing I'd like you to understand: that when your wives and children shall be left without a potater to their mouths or a rag to their backs, you needn't come whining to me to help 'em. Don't you forget to bear that in mind, my men."

Waiting for her at her own home, Mrs. Gass found Richard North. That this was a very anxious time for him, might be detected by the ever-thoughtful look his face wore habitually. It was all very well for Mrs. Gass, so amply provided for, to take the reigning troubles easily; Richard was less philosophical. And with cause. His own ruin—and the final closing of the works would be nothing less—might be got over. He had his profession, his early manhood, his energies; his capability and character alike stood high; he could have no fear of making a living for himself, even though it had to be done in the service of some more fortunate firm, and not in his own. But there was his father. If the works came to a permanent close, the income Mr. North enjoyed from them could no longer be paid. All Mr. North's resources, whether hitherto derived from them or from Richard's generosity, would vanish like the mists of a summer's morning.

"What's it you, Mr. Richard?" cried Mrs. Gass when she entered, and saw him standing near the window of her dining-room. "I'd not have stopped out if I'd known you were here. Some of them men have been hearing a bit of my mind," she added, sitting down behind the

plants and untying her bonnet-strings. "It's come to pawning of the women's best gowns now."

"Has it," replied Richard North, rather abstractedly, as if he were buried in thought. "Of course it must come to that, sooner or later."

"Sooner or later it 'ud come to the pawning of their skins—an' they were able to strip 'em off," spoke Mrs. Gass. "If this state of things is to last, they'll have nothing else left of 'em to strip."

Richard wheeled round, took a chair in front of Mrs. Gass, and sat down in it. He had come to make a proposition to her; one he did not quite cordially approve of himself; and from that cause his manner was perhaps a trifle less ready than usual. Richard North had received from Mrs. Gass, at the time of her late husband's death, full power to act on his own responsibility, just as he had held it from Mr. Gass; but in all weighty matters he had made a point of consulting them: Mr. Gass while he lived, Mrs. Gass since.

"It is a question that I have been asking myself a little too often for my peace—how long this state of things will last, and what will be its end," said Richard in answer to her last words, his low tone almost painfully earnest. "The longer it goes on, the worse it will be; for the men and for us."

"That's precisely what I tell 'em," acquiesced Mrs. Gass, tilting back her bonnet and fanning her face with her handkerchief. "But I might just as well speak to so many postesses."

"Yes; talking will not avail. I have talked to them; and find it to be only waste of words. If they listen to my arguments and feel inclined to be impressed with them, the influences of the Trade Union undo it all again. I think we must try something else."

"And what's that, Mr. Richard?"

"Give way a little."

"Give way!" repeated Mrs. Gass, pushing her chair some inches back in her surprise. "What! give 'em what they want?"

"Certainly not. That is what we could not do. I said give way a little."

"Mr. Richard, I never would."

"What I thought of proposing is this: To divide the additional wages they are standing out for. That is, offer them half. If they would not return to work on those terms, on that concession, I should have no hope of them."

"And my opinion is, they'd *not*. Mr. Richard, sir, it's them Trade Union people that upholds 'em in their obstinacy. They'll make 'em hold out, them misleading Unionists, for the whole demands or none. What do the leaders of the Union care? It don't touch their pockets, or their comforts. So long as their own nests be feathered, the working man's may get as bare as boards. Don't you fancy the rulers 'll let our

men give way half. It's only by keeping up the agitation that them agitators live."

"I should like to put it to the test. I have come here to ask you to agree to my doing it."

"And what about the shortening of the time that they want?" questioned Mrs. Gass.

"I should not give way there. It is not practicable. They must return on the usual time: but of the additional wages demanded I would offer half. Will you assent to this?"

"It will be with an uncommon bad grace," was Mrs. Gass's answer.

"I see nothing else that can be done," said Richard North. "If only as a matter of conscience I should wish to propose it. When it ends in a comprehensive ruin—which seems only too certain, for we cannot shut our eyes to what is being enacted all over the country in almost all trades—and the women and children come to lie under our very eyes here, famished and naked, I shall have the consolation of knowing that it is the men's own fault, not mine. Perhaps they will accept this offer: I hope so, though it will leave us but little profit. If we can only make both ends meet, just to keep us going during these unsettled times, we must be satisfied. I am sure I shall be doing right, Mrs. Gass, to make this proposal."

"Mr. Richard, sir, you know that I've trusted to your judgment always, and shall trust it to the end; anything you thought well to do, I should never dissuade from. You shall make this offer if you please: but I know you'll be opening for the men a loop-hole. Give 'em an inch, and they'll want to take an ell."

"If they come back it will be a great thing," argued Richard. "The sight of the works standing still; the knowledge that all else involved is standing still, almost paralyses me."

"Don't you go and take it to heart at the beginning now," affectionately advised Mrs. Gass. "There's not much damage done yet."

Richard bent forward, a painful earnestness on his face. "It is of my father that I think. What will become of him if all our means are stopped?"

"I'll take care of him till better times come round," said Mrs. Gass heartily. "And of you too, Mr. Richard; if you won't be too proud to let me, sir."

Richard laughed; a slight, genial laugh; partly in amusement, partly in gratitude. "I hope the better times will come at once," he said, preparing to leave. "At least, sufficiently good ones to allow of business going on as usual. If the men refuse this offer of mine, they are made of more ungrateful stuff than I should give them credit for."

"They *will* refuse it," said Mrs. Gass emphatically. "As is my belief. Not them, Mr. Richard, sir, but the Trades Unions for 'em."

Once get under the thumb of that despotic body, and a workman daredn't say his soul is his own."

And Mrs. Gass's opinion proved to be the correct one. Richard North called his men together, and laid the concession before them; pressing them to accept it in their mutual interests. The men requested a day for consideration, and then gave their answer: rejection. Unless the whole of their demands were complied with, they unequivocally refused to return to work.

"It will be worse for them than for me in the long run," said Richard North.

And many a thoughtful mind believed that he spoke in a spirit of prophecy.

CHAPTER XVI.

MORNING VISITORS.

In the dining-parlour at Mrs. Cumberland's, with its large window open to the garden and the sweet flowers, stood Ellen Adair. It was the favourite morning-room. Mrs. Cumberland, up in good time to-day, for it was barely eleven o'clock, had stepped forth into the garden, and had disappeared amid its remoter parts.

Ellen Adair, wearing a dress of cool pink muslin, almost as thin as gauze, stood in a reverie. A pleasant one, to judge by the soft blush on her face and the sweet smile that parted her lips. She was twirling the plain gold ring round and round her finger, thinking no doubt of the hour when it was put on, and the words spoken with it. Bessy Rane had wholly refused to give back the ring she was married with, and Ellen retained the other.

The intimacy with Arthur Bohun, the silent love-making, had been going on always. Even now, she was listening lest haply his footsteps might be heard; listening with hushed breath and beating heart. Never a day passed but he contrived to call, on some plea or other, at Mrs. Cumberland's, morning, afternoon, or evening: and this morning he might be coming, for aught she knew. At the close of the past summer, Mrs. Cumberland had gone to the Isle of Wight for change of air, taking Ellen and her maid Jelly. She hired a secluded cottage in the neighbourhood of Niton. Singular to say, Captain Bohun remembered that he had friends at Niton—an old invalid brother officer, who was living there in great economy. On and off, on and off, during the whole time of Mrs. Cumberland's stay—and that lasted five months, for she had gone the beginning of September and did not come home until the end of February—was Arthur Bohun paying visits to this old friend. Now for a day or two; now for a week or two; once for three weeks together. And still Mrs. Cumberland suspected nothing! It was as if

her eyes were held. Perhaps they were: there is a destiny in all things, and it must be worked out. It is true that she did not see or suspect half the intimacy. A gentle walk once a day by the sea was all she took. At other times Ellen rambled at will; sometimes attended by Jelly, alone when Jelly could not be spared. Captain Bohun took every care of her, guarding her more jealously than he would have guarded a sister: and this did a little surprise Mrs. Cumberland.

"We ought to feel obliged to Captain Bohun, Ellen," she said on one occasion. "It's not many a young man would sacrifice his time to us. Your father, and his, and my husband the chaplain, were warm friends for a little time in India: it must be the knowledge of that that induces him to be so attentive. Very civil of him!"

Ellen coloured vividly. Eminently truthful, of a nature antagonistic to deceit, she yet did not dare to say that perhaps that was *not* Captain Bohun's reason for being attentive. How could she hint at Captain Bohun's love, plain though it was to her own heart, when he had never spoken a syllable to her about it? It was not possible. So things went on in the same routine: he and she wandering together on the seashore; both of them living in a dream of Elysium. In February, when they returned home, the scene was changed, but not the companionship. It was an early spring that year, warm and genial. Many and many an hour were they together in that seductive garden of Mrs. Cumberland's, with its miniature rocks, its mossy grass soft as velvet; the birds would be singing and their own hearts dancing. But Mrs. Cumberland's eyes were not to be always closed.

It was scarcely to be expected that so good-looking a girl as Ellen Adair, should remain long without a declared suitor. Especially when their was a rumour that she would have a fortune—though how the latter arose, or whence its grounds, people would have been puzzled to tell. A gentleman of good position in the vicinity; no other than Mr. Graves, son of one of the county members; took to make rather pointed visits at Mrs. Cumberland's. That his object was Ellen Adair, and that he would most likely be asking her to become his wife, Mrs. Cumberland saw. She wrote to Mr. Adair in Australia, telling him she thought Ellen was about to receive an offer of marriage, eligible in every way. The young man was of high character, good family, and large means, she said: should she, if the proposal came, accept it for Ellen. By a singular omission, which perhaps Mrs. Cumberland was not conscious of, she did not mention Mr. Graves's name. But the proposal came sooner than Mrs. Cumberland had bargained for: barely was this letter despatched—about which in her characteristic reticence, she said not a word to anybody—when Mr. Graves spoke to Ellen and was refused. It was this that opened Mrs. Cumberland's eyes to the nature of the friendship between Ellen and Captain Bohun. She then wrote a second letter to Mr. Adair, saying Ellen had refused Mr. Graves in consequence,

as she strongly suspected, of an attachment to Arthur Bohun—the son of Major Bohun, whom Mr. Adair once knew so well. That Arthur Bohun would be wishing to make Ellen his wife, there could be, Mrs. Cumberland thought from observation, no doubt : might he be accepted ? In a worldly point of view, Captain Bohun was not so desirable as Mr. Graves, she added—unless indeed he should succeed to his uncle's baronetcy, which was not very improbable, the present heir being sickly—but he would have enough to live upon as a gentleman, and he was liked by every one. This second letter was also despatched to Australia by the mail following the one that took the first. Having thus done her duty, Mrs. Cumberland sat down to wait placidly for Mr. Adair's answer, tacitly allowing the intimacy to continue, in-as-much as she did not stop the visits of Arthur Bohun. Neither he nor Ellen suspected what she had done.

And with the summer weather there had come in another suitor to Ellen Adair. At least another was displaying signs that he would like to become one. It was Mr. Seeley, the doctor who had replaced Mr. Alexander. Soon after Mrs. Cumberland's return from Niton in February, she had been for a week or two alarmingly ill, and Mr. Seeley was called in as well as her son. He had continued to be on terms of friendship at her house ; and it became rather palpable that he very very much admired Miss Adair.

Things were in this state on this summer's morning, and Ellen Adair stood near the window twirling round and round the plain gold ring on her finger. Presently she came out of her reverie, unlocked a small letter-case, and began to write in her diary.

"Tuesday. Mrs. Cumberland talks of going away again. She seems to me to get thinner and weaker. Arthur says the same. He ——"

A knock at the front door, and Mr. Seeley was shown in. He paid a professional visit to Mrs. Cumberland at least every other morning. Not as a professional man, he told her ; but as a friend, that he might see how she went on.

Miss Adair shook hands with him, her clasp and her manner alike cold. He saw it not ; and his fingers parted lingeringly from hers.

"Mrs. Cumberland is in the garden, if you will go to her, Mr. Seeley," said Ellen affecting to be quite occupied with her letter-case. I think she wants to see you ; she is not at all well. You will find her in the grotto : or somewhere about."

To this semi-command Mr. Seeley answered nothing, except that he was in no hurry, and would look after Mrs. Cumberland by and by. He was a dark man of about two-and-thirty, with a plain, honest face ; straight-forward in disposition and manner, timid only when with Ellen Adair. He took a step or two nearer Ellen, and began to address her in a low tone, pulling one of his gloves about nervously.

"I have been wishing for an opportunity of speaking to you, Miss

Adair. There is a question that I—that I—should like to put. One I have very much at heart."

It was coming. In spite of Ellen Adair's studious coldness to him, by which she had meant him to take a lesson and learn that he must *not* speak, she saw that it was coming. In the pause he made, as if he would wait for her permission to go on, she felt miserably uncomfortable. Her nature was essentially generous and sensitive: to have to refuse Mr. Seeley, or any one else, made her feel as humiliated as though she had committed a crime. And she could have esteemed the man apart from this.

They were thus standing: Mr. Seeley looking awkward and nervous, tearing at his glove as no sane man would do; Ellen turning red and white and hot and cold: when Arthur Bohun walked in. Mr. Seeley, effectually interrupted for the time, muttered a good morning to Captain Bohun and shot into the garden.

"What was Seeley saying, Ellen?"

"Nothing," she rather faintly answered.

"*Nothing!*"

Ellen glanced up at him. His face wore the haughty Bohun look; his mouth betrayed scorn enough for ten of the proud Bohuns put together. She did not answer.

"If he were saying 'nothing' why should you be looking as you did?—with a great hot blush on your face, and your eyes cast down?"

"He had really said as good as nothing, Arthur. What he might have been going to say, I—I don't know. It was only that minute he had come in."

"As you please," coldly returned Arthur, walking into the garden in his turn. "If you do not think me worthy of your confidence, I have no more to say."

The Bohun blood was bubbling up in a fierce turmoil. Not in doubt of Ellen; not in resentment against her—at least only so in the moment's passion: but in angry indignation that Seeley, a common village practitioner, should dare to lift his profane eyes to Ellen Adair. Captain Bohun had suspected the man's hopes for some short time; there's an instinct in these things; and felt outrageous over it. Tom Graves's venture had filled him with resentment; but he at least was a gentleman of position.

Ellen, wonderfully disturbed, gently sat down to write again; all she did was gentle. And the diary got some sentences added to it.

"That senseless William Seeley! And after showing him as plainly as I could show, that it is useless—that I should consider it an impertinence in him to attempt to speak to me. I don't know whether it was for the worst or the best that Arthur should have come in just at that moment. For the best because it stopped Mr.

Seeley's nonsense; for the worst because Arthur has now seen and is vexed. The vexation will not last, for he knows better. Here they are."

Once more Ellen closed her diary. The "Here they are," applied to the doctor and Mrs. Cumberland. They were walking slowly towards the window, conversing calmly on her ailments, and came in. Mrs. Cumberland sat down with her newspaper. As Mr. Seeley took his departure to visit other patients, Arthur Bohun returned. Close upon that, Richard North was shown in. It seemed that Mrs. Cumberland was to be rich in visitors that morning.

That Richard North should find his time hang somewhat on hand, was only natural; he, the hitherto actively-employed man, who had often wished the day's hours to be doubled, for the business he had to do in it. Richard could afford to make morning calls on his friends now, and he had come strolling to Mrs. Cumberland's.

They sat down. Arthur in the remotest chair he could find from Ellen Adair: she had taken up a bit of light work, and her fairy fingers were plying its threads deftly. Richard sat near Ellen, facing Mrs. Cumberland. He could not help thinking how lovely Ellen Adair was: the fact had never struck him more forcibly than to-day.

"How is the strike getting on, Richard?"

Mrs. Cumberland laid down her newspaper to ask the question. No other theme bore so much present interest in Dallory. From the time that North and Gass first established the works, things had gone on with one continuous smoothness, peace and plenty reigning on all sides. No wonder this startling innovation seemed like a revolution.

"It is *going* on," replied Richard. "How the men are getting on, I don't like to think. The wrong way of course."

"Your proposition, to meet them half-way, was rejected, I hear."

"It was."

"What do they expect to come to?"

"To fortune, I should fancy," returned Richard. "To abjure work and *not* expect a fortune, must be rather a mistake. A poor look-out at the best."

"But, according to the newspapers, Richard, one half of the working classes that the country contains, are out on strike. Do you believe it?"

"A vast number are out. And more are going out daily."

"And what is to become of them all?"

"I cannot tell. The question, serious though it is, appears never to occur to the men or their rulers."

"The journals say—living so much alone as I do, I have time to read many, and I make it my chief recreation—that the work is leaving the country," pursued Mrs. Cumberland.

"And so it is. It cannot be otherwise. Take a case of my own as an example. A contract was offered me some days ago, and I could not take it. Literally *could not*, Mrs. Cumberland. My men are out on strike, and likely to be out; I had no means of performing it, and therefore could only reject it. That contract, as I happen to know, has been taken by a firm in Belgium. They have undertaken it at a cheaper rate than I could possibly have done at the best of times; for labour there is cheaper. It is true. The work that circumstances compelled me to refuse, is gone over there to be executed, and I and my men are playing in idleness."

"But what will be the end of it?" asked Mrs. Cumberland.

"The end of it? If you speak of the country, neither you nor I can foresee."

"I spoke of the men. Not your men in particular, Mr. Richard North, but all those that we include under the name of British workmen: the vast bodies of artisans scattered in the various localities of the kingdom. What is to become of these men if the work fails?"

"I see but one of three courses for them," said Richard, lifting his hand in some agitation, for he spoke from the depth of his heart, believing the subject to be of more awful gravity than any that had stirred the community for some hundreds of years. "They must even emigrate—provided that the means to do so can be found; or they must become burdens upon the public charity; or they must lie down in the street and starve. As I live, I can foresee no better fate for them."

"And what of the country, if it comes to this?—if the work and the workmen leave it?"

Richard North shrugged his shoulders. It was altogether a question too difficult for him. He would have liked to get it answered from somebody else very much indeed: just as others would.

"Lively conversation!" interposed Captain Bohun, in a half-satirical, half-joking manner, as he rose. It was the first time he had spoken. "I think I must be going," he added, approaching Mrs. Cumberland.

Richard made it the signal for his own departure. As they stood, saying adieu, Bessy Rane was seen for a moment at her own window. Mrs. Cumberland nodded.

"There's Bessy," exclaimed Richard. "I think I'll go and speak to her. Will you pardon me, Mrs. Cumberland, if I make my exit from your house this way?"

Mrs. Cumberland stepped outside herself, and Richard crossed the low wire fence that divided the two gardens. Arthur Bohun went to the door, never having said a word of farewell to Ellen Adair. He stood with it in his hand looking at her, smiled, and was returning, when Mrs. Cumberland came in again.

"Won't you come and say adieu to me here, Ellen?"

The invitation was given in so low a tone that she gathered it by the

form of his lips rather than by the ear ; perhaps by instinct also. She went out, and they walked side by the side in silence to the open hall door. Dallory Ham, in its primitive ways and manners, left its house-doors open with perfect safety by day to admit the summer air. Outside, between the house and the gate, was a strip of a bed planted with flowers. Arrived at the door, Captain Bohun could find nothing better to talk of than these, as he stood with her on the crimson mat.

"I think those lilies are finer than Mr. North's."

"Mrs. Cumberland takes so much pains with her flowers," was Ellen's answer. "And she is very fond of lilies."

They stepped out, bending over these self-same lilies. Ellen picked one. He quietly took it from her.

"Forgive me, Ellen," he murmured. "I am not a bear in general. Good bye."

As they stood : her hand in his for the parting greeting ; her flushed face downcast, shrinking in maiden modesty from the gaze of love that was bent upon her, Mrs. North's open carriage rolled past. The head of Madam was suddenly pushed as far towards them as safety permitted : her eyes glared ; a stony horror sat on her countenance.

"Shameful ! Disgraceful !" hissed Madam. And Miss Matilda North by her side started up to see what the shame might be.

Arthur Bohun had caught the words and the hiss : not Ellen : and bit his lips in a complication of feeling.

But all he did was to raise his hat ; first to his mother, then to Ellen, as he went out at the gate. Madam flung herself back on her seat ; and the carriage pursued its course up the Ham.

CHAPTER XVII.

THREE LETTERS FOR DR. RANE.

"You are keeping quality hours, Bessy—as our nurse used to say when we were children," was Richard North's salutation to his sister, as he went in and saw the table laid for breakfast.

Mrs. Rane laughed. She was busy at work : sewing some buttons on a white waistcoat of her husband's.

"Oliver was called out at seven this morning, and has not come back yet," she explained.

"And you are waiting breakfast for him ! You must be starving."

"I took a piece of bread-and-butter and some coffee when Molly had hers. How is papa, Richard ?"

"Anything but well. Very much worried, for one thing."

"Madam and Matilda are back, I hear," continued Bessy.

"Three days ago. They have brought Miss Field with them."

"And Madam has brought her usual temper, I suppose," added Bessy. "No wonder papa is suffering."

"That of course: it will never be otherwise. But he is troubling himself also very much about the works being stopped. I tell him to leave all such trouble to me: but it is of no use."

"When will the strike end, Richard?"

Richard shook his head. It was an unprofitable theme, and he did not wish to pursue it with Bessy. She had enough cares of her own, as he suspected, without their being added to. Three letters lay on the table, close by where Richard was sitting: they were addressed to Dr. Rane. His fingers began turning them about mechanically; quite in abstraction.

"I know the hand-writing of two of them," remarked Bessy, possibly fancying he was curious on the point. "Not of the third."

"The one is from America," observed Richard, looking at the letters for the first time.

"Yes; it's from Dr. Jones. He would like Oliver to join him in America."

"To join him for what?" asked Richard.

Bessy looked at him. She saw no reason why her brother should not be told. Dr. Rane wished it kept secret from the world; but this, she thought, could not apply to her good and trustworthy brother Richard. She opened her heart and told him all; not what they were going certainly to do, for ways and means lay in doubt yet; but what they hoped to be able to do. Richard, excessively surprised, listened in silence.

They had made up their minds to quit Dallory. Dr. Rane had taken a dislike to the place—and no wonder, Bessy added in a parenthesis, when he was not getting on at all. He intended to leave it as soon as ever the practice was disposed of.

"I expect this letter will decide it," concluded Bessy, touching one that bore the London post-mark. "It is from a Mr. Lynch, who is wishing to get a practice in the country on account of his health—London smoke does not do for him, he tells Oliver. They have had a good deal of correspondence together, and I know his hand-writing quite well. Oliver said he expected to get his decision to-day or to-morrow. He is to pay £200 and take to the furniture at a valuation."

"And then—do I understand you arightly, Bessy—you and Rane are going to America?" questioned Richard.

"Oh no," said Bessy with emphasis. "I must have explained badly, Richard. What I said was, that Dr. Jones, who has more practice in America than he knows what to do with, had offered a share of it to Oliver if he would go and join him. Oliver declined it. He would have liked to go, for he thinks it must be an exceedingly good thing; but Dr. Jones wants a large premium. So it's out of the question."

"But surely you would not have liked to emigrate, Bessy!"

She glanced into Richard's face with her meek, loving eyes, blushing a very little.

"I would go anywhere that he goes," she answered simply: "It would cost me pain to leave you and papa, Richard; especially papa, because he is old, and because he would feel it: but Oliver is my husband."

Richard drummed for a minute or two on the table-cloth. Bessy sewed on her last button.

"Then where does Rane think of pitching his tent, Bessy?"

"Somewhere in London. He says there's no place like it for getting on. Should this letter be to say that Mr. Lynch takes the practice, we shall be away in less than a month."

"And you have never told us!"

"We decided to say nothing until it was a settled thing: and then only to you, and Mrs. Cumberland, and papa. Oliver does not want the world to know it sooner than need be."

"But—do you mean to say that Rane has not told his mother?" responded Richard to this in some surprise.

"Not yet," said Bessy, shaking out the completed waistcoat. "It will be sure to vex her; and perhaps needlessly: for, suppose, after all, we do not go? That entirely depends upon the disposal of the practice here."

Bessy was picking up the threads in her neat way and putting the remaining buttons in the little closed box, when Dr. Rane was heard to enter and go into his consulting-room. Away flew Bessy to the kitchen; bringing in the things with her own loving hands—and, for the matter of that, Molly Green was at her up-stairs work: buttered toast, broiled ham, a dainty dish of stewed mushrooms. There was nothing she liked so much as to wait on her husband. Her step was light and soft, her eye bright: Richard, looking on, saw how much she cared for him.

Dr. Rane came in, wiping his brow; the day was hot, and he tired. He had walked from a farm house a mile beyond the Ham. A strangely-weary look sat on his face.

"Don't trouble, Bessy. I have had my breakfast. Ah Richard, how d'y'e do?"

"You have had your breakfast!" repeated Bessy. "At the farm?"

"Yes. They gave me some."

"Oh dear! won't you eat a bit of the ham, or of the mushrooms, Oliver? They are so good. And I waited."

"I am sorry you should wait. No I can't eat two breakfasts. You must eat for me and yourself, Bessy."

Dr. Rane sat down in his own chair at the table, turning it towards Richard, and took up the letters. Selecting the one from Mr. Lynch,

he was about to open it when Bessy—who was now beginning her breakfast—spoke.

"Oliver, I have told Richard about it—what we think of doing."

Dr. Rane's glance went out for a moment to his brother-in-law's and met it. He made the best of the situation, smiled gaily, and put down the letter unopened.

"Are you surprised, Richard?" he asked.

"Very much indeed. Had a stranger told me I was going to leave Dallory myself—and indeed that may well come to be, with this strike in the air—I'd as soon have believed it. Shall you be doing well to go, do you think, Rane?"

"Am I doing well here?" was the doctor's rejoinder.

"Not very, I fear."

"And, with this strike on, it gets all the worse. The wives and children get ill as usual, and I am called in, but the men have no money wherewith to pay me. I don't intend to bring Bessy to a crust; and I think it would come to that if we stayed here——"

"No, no; not quite to that, Oliver," she interposed. But he took no notice.

"Therefore I shall try my fortune elsewhere," continued Dr. Rane

And if you would return thanks to the quarter whence the blow has originally come, you must pay them to your step-mother, Richard. It is she who has driven me away."

Richard was silent. Dr. Rane broke the seal of Mr. Lynch's letter, and read it to the end. Then, laying it down, he took up the one from America, and read that. Bessy, looking across, tried to gather some information from his countenance: but Dr. Rane's face was one which, in an ordinary way, it was no more easier to read than a stone.

"Is it favourable news, Oliver?" she asked, as he finished the long letter, and folded it.

"It's nothing particular. Jones runs on upon politics. He generally gives me a good dose of *them*."

"Oh I meant from Mr. Lynch," replied Bessy. "Is he coming?"

"Mr. Lynch declines."

"Declines?—Oliver!"

"Declines the negotiation. And he is not much better than a snob for giving me all the trouble that he has, and then crying off at the eleventh hour," added Dr. Rane.

"It is bad behaviour," said Bessy warmly. "What excuse does he make?"

"You can see what he says," said Dr. Rane, pushing the letter away from him. Bessy opened it—and read it aloud for the benefit of Richard.

Mr. Lynch took up all one side with apologies. The substance of the letter was, that a practice had unexpectedly been offered to him at the sea-side; which air and locality would suit his state of health

better. If he could be of use in negotiating with any one else, he added, Dr. Rane was to make use of him.

It was as courteous and explanatory a letter as could be written. But still it was a refusal: and the negotiation was at an end. Bessy Rane drew a deep breath: whether of relief or disappointment it might have puzzled herself to decide. Perhaps there lay in it a mixture of both.

"Then, after all, Oliver, we shall not be leaving!"

"Not at present, it seems," was Dr. Rane's answer. And he put the two letters into his pocket.

"Perhaps you will be thinking again, Oliver, of America now?" said his wife.

"Oh no I shall not."

"Does Dr. Jones still urge you to come?"

"Not particularly. He took my refusal for final."

She went on, slowly eating some of the mushrooms. Richard said nothing: this projected removal seemed to have impressed him to silence. Dr. Rane took up the remaining letter and turned it about, looking at the outside.

"Do you know the writing, Oliver?" she asked.

"Not at all. The post-mark's Whitborough."

Opening the letter, which appeared to contain only a few lines, Dr. Rane looked up with an exclamation.

"How strange! How very strange! Bessy, you and I are the only two left in the Tontine."

"What!" she cried, scarcely understanding him. Richard North turned his head.

"That tontine that we were both put in as infants. There was only one life left in it besides ours—old Massey's son of Whitborough. He is dead."

"What!—George Massey? Dead!" cried Richard North.

Dr. Rane handed him the note. Yes: it was even so. The other life had dropped, and Oliver Rane's and his wife's alone remained.

"My father has called that an unlucky tontine," remarked Richard. "I have heard it said that if you want a child to live, you should put it in a tontine, for the tontine lives are sure to arrive at a green old age, to the mutual general mortification. I am sorry about George Massey. I wonder what he has died of?"

"Last long, in general, do you say?" returned Dr. Rane, musingly. "I don't know much about tontines myself."

"Neither do I," said Richard. "I remember hearing talk of one tontine when I was a boy: five or six individuals were left in it, all over eighty then, and in flourishing health. Perhaps that was why my father and Mr. Gass took up with one. At any rate, it seems that you and Bessy, are the only two remaining in this."

"I wonder if a similar condition of things ever existed before as

for a man and his wife to be the two last in a tontine?" cried Dr. Rane, slightly laughing. "Bessy, practically it can be of no use to us conjointly; for before the money can be paid, one of us must die. What senseless things Tontines are!"

"Senseless indeed," answered Bessy. "I'd say something to it if we could have the money now. How much is it?"

"Ay, by the way, how much is it? What was it that each member put in at first, Richard? I forget.—Fifty pounds, was it? And then there's the compound interest, which has been going on for thirty years. How much would it amount to now?"

"More than two thousand pounds," answered Richard North, making a mental calculation.

Dr. Rane's face flushed with a quick hot flush: a light shone in his eye: his lips parted, as with some deep emotions. "More than two thousand pounds!" he echoed under his breath. "Two thousand pounds! Bessy, it would be like a gold mine."

She laughed slightly. "But we can't get it, you see, Oliver. And I am sure neither of us wishes the other dead."

"No—no; certainly not," said Dr. Rane.

Richard North said Good day, and left. Just before turning in at the gates of Dallory Hall, he met a gig containing Lawyer Dale of Whitborough, who was driving somewhere with his clerk; no other than Timothy Wilks. Mr. Dale pulled up, to speak.

"Can it be true that George Massey is dead?" questioned Richard as they were parting.

"It's true enough, poor fellow. He died yesterday: been ill but two days."

"I've just heard it at Dr. Rane's. He got a letter this morning to tell him."

"Dr. Rane did? I was not aware they knew each other."

"No more did they. But they were both in that tontine. Now that George Massey's gone, Dr. Rane and his wife are the only two remaining in it. Rather singular that it should be so."

For a minute Mr. Dale could not recollect whether he had ever heard of this particular tontine; although, being a lawyer, he made it his business to know everything; and he and Richard talked of it together. Excessively singular, Lawyer Dale agreed, that a tontine should be practically useless to a man and his wife—unless one of them died.

"Very mortifying, I must say, Mr. Richard North; especially where the money would be welcome. Two thousand pounds! Dr. Rane must wish the senseless thing at Hanover. I should, I know, if it were my case. Good morning."

And quiet Timothy Wilks, across whom they talked, heard all that was said, and unconsciously treasured it up in his memory.

Richard carried home the news to his father. Mr. North was seated at the table in his parlour, some papers before him. He lifted his hands in dismay.

"Dead! George Massey dead! Dick, as sure as we are here, there must be something wrong about that tontine! They'd never drop off like this, else; one after another."

"It's not much more than a week ago, sir, that I met George Massey in Whitborough, and was talking with him. To all appearance he was as healthy and likely to live as I am."

"What took him off?"

"Dale says it was nothing more than a neglected cold."

"I don't like it; Dick, I don't like it," reiterated Mr. North, "Bessy may be the next to go, or Rane."

"I hope not, father."

"Well—I've had it in my head for ever so long that that tontine is an unlucky one; I think it is going to be so to the end. We shall see. Look here, Dick."

He pointed to some of the papers before him; used cheques, apparently; pushing them towards his son.

"They sent me word at the bank that my account was over-drawn. I knew it could not be, and asked for my cheques. Dick, here are four or five that I never drew."

Richard took them in his fingers. The filling-up was in Madam's handwriting: the signature apparently in Mr. North's.

"Do you give Mrs. North blank cheques ready signed, sir?"

"No, never, Dick. I was cured of that, years ago. When she wants money, I sometimes let her fill in the cheque, but I never sign it beforehand."

"And you think you have not signed these?"

"Think! I know I have not. She has imitated my signature, and got the money."

Richard's face grew dark with shame; shame for his step-mother. But that Mr. North was her husband, it would have been downright forgery: perhaps the law, if called upon, might have accounted it such now. He took time for consideration.

"Father, I think—pardon me for the suggestion—I think you had better let your private account be passed over to me. Allow it to lie in my name; and make my signature alone available—just as it is with our business account. I see no other way of safety."

"With all my heart; I'd be glad to do it," acquiesced Mr. North, "but there's no account to pass. There's no account to pass, Dick; it's overdrawn."

(To be continued.)

DANTE.

IT was the middle of the 13th century. A dense darkness relieved only here and there by a glimmer from the lamp in the cell of a monk, or by a flash of light from the eyes of a troubadour, was spread over the intellects of all Christendom. Unless the higher powers in the brain of man were to sink entirely down into his grosser animal nature, it was full time for the dawn of a brighter day to rise. And such a morning was in truth at hand. The year 1265 had not come to an end, when in an old house at Florence there struggled into the world, in the frail life of a little child, a spark which, as years went on, was to burn up to a blaze of genius that should shine from the Mediterranean to the German Ocean, and for centuries be a beacon to the minds of men. That child was Dante. The boy came of a good old Florentine stock, and there was a strain of courage and romance in the blood that ran through his veins; for one of his ancestors was a crusader. Those warriors of the cross must have been true poets at heart, as well as true soldiers, who could leave their homes, to go and fight in a distant land for a mere religious sentiment. At that time it was impossible for the republic of Florence to keep her place among the Italian states, without leaning upon the strong arm of either the German Emperor or the Pope.

Dante's father was a partizan of the latter, and the boy was therefore brought up in the political creed of the Guelphs: such was the name given at that period to the friends of the pontiff. Thus it happened, that though in after life Dante, as we shall see, changed parties, his strict reverence for the dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church still clung very closely to him, and shaped in some measure the plan of his great poem. Singularly enough, nothing is known of Dante's mother, except that her Christian name was Bella, and that she was his father's second wife.

There is full proof of Dante having been a very imaginative boy in the only incident which we know of his childhood, narrated by himself in his "Vita Nuova." Let us glance for a moment at the picture thus afforded us.

It is a grand feast in the house of the Signor Portinari, a Florentine citizen, whose princely fortune is only equalled by his boundless liberality.

Servants are hurrying about with roasted peacocks, grim boars' heads, fantastic piles of sugar-work, and all the other indispensable dainties of a mediæval banquet. The door of the house is surrounded by young ladies that leap lightly from their palfreys; portly dames that step slowly

from their litters ; gay gallants in doublets of the newest cut ; staid magistrates of the city in gold chains of office. Among the rest we notice a middle-aged man with his young wife at his side. Behind this pair trots a boy of nine, with black eyes, which are alternately inquisitive and dreamy, a dark southern complexion, and a handsome aquiline nose. Soon the guests are seated at the table, and the boy glances in turns at the glitter of silver on the board, the rich dresses of those around it, and the tempting variety of the dishes. Before long, however, his eyes wander to a pretty little girl about a year younger than himself, the daughter of the host, and become rivetted upon her face with a grave earnestness of admiration in their gaze.

We know not whether when the banquet was half over the children were released and allowed to go and play in the garden, or whether, as little martyrs to ceremony, they were forced to sit on for many a heavy hour of eating and drinking. But through the veil of time which century after century has folded more thickly between that day and this, we can see that look as distinctly as if Portinari's feast had been yesterday set on the table ; and we who are interested in this history should mark it well, for it is the first look fixed by Dante on Beatrice. From that moment he himself dates his love for her. And though the imagination of the poet in after years may have exaggerated the strength of his feelings at this early age, we know that the life of the boy of nine, was then really first tinged with a passion which coloured deeply the whole story of the man even till its closing scene.

From the vast stores of knowledge of all kinds made use of in his works, we should suppose that Dante's education must have been a very comprehensive one. Perhaps, however, some of these stores were collected by him in later life. When he was about seventeen or eighteen his love for Beatrice (with whom no doubt he had been in familiar daily intercourse) had so far ripened that he made a formal declaration of it to her father, but with no favourable result. Why his suit was rejected it is quite impossible to determine. Perhaps Dante, in a pecuniary light, was deemed no fit match for a rich man's daughter. Perhaps old Portinari scented the embryo poet in his proposed son-in-law, and took fright thereat. We have no means of knowing what were the feelings of Beatrice ; we suspect that in her inmost heart she returned his affection ; but the idea we gain of her in her lover's writings is exactly such as to make us think her the sort of woman to bow her head meekly before the exaggerated power then conceded to parental authority, and to keep her tears for hours of solitude. Dante especially speaks of the moral grace of Christian womanhood which appeared in her very step and air : and we can well believe that it was in her strong religious faith that Portinari's gentle daughter found the support which enabled her to tread the rugged path she regarded as that of her duty.

The fruits of this early disappointment were for Dante, nine years

more unsettled than even those which generally fall to the lot of young genius. He went in turns to all the universities for which, at that period, Italy was so famous, and bore away from each the palm in every branch of learning. Not content with these triumphs in his native land, he travelled abroad, and distinguished himself equally at the university of Paris, and even, it is said, at Oxford. He became a citizen of the world, and studied the book of human nature, in both its bright and dark pages. He returned to Florence, and made himself known by the most daring personal bravery on the hard-fought field of Campaldino, and at the siege of Caprona. But alike in the hall of the schoolmen, and in the din of battle, and even in the bower of pleasure, her image still shone in the holiest of holies of his heart.

At the early age of twenty-five Beatrice died. After that a resigned calm seems to have come upon Dante's spirit. He settled down at Florence, and began to lead a regular common-place life. His relations and friends were delighted with the change, but like many other relations and friends in similar cases, they could not be contented to leave well alone. To see him the pattern citizen was not enough for these good officious folks; they wanted to see him also the pattern family man. They therefore set diligently to work to find a wife for their young kinsman. We cannot help fancying that the poet's female connections must have had the chief hand in this business: and we can picture to ourselves the mysterious petticoat conclaves and solemn whisperings that must have been carried on at poor young Dante's expense. At length they found, as they thought, exactly their woman, in Gemma Donati, a lady of much beauty, some fortune, and good family. Dante, after a little persuasion, yielded to the proposal, and we cannot be among those who blame him for doing so. He could not, it is true, love another as he had loved Beatrice; but he could offer Gemma a loyal friendship, which would, he hoped, with years, strengthen into something warmer. No doubt he believed he should find in domestic life, a haven for his weary storm-tossed heart. He knew little of the real Gemma before marriage, and probably the Gemma of his dreams was a gentle sympathetic creature, who would pick up gratefully any crumbs of affection he might throw to her, and soon learn to weep with him over the grave of Beatrice.

But when he was married, he soon found out his mistake. Gemma was a good wife, passionately devoted to her husband, faithful, diligent in household duties, and ready to be in all business of daily life his trusty counsellor. But this Gem had a flaw, which was a very unsightly one; for it was a flaw of temper. Therefore, when she found that her husband only gave her a little bit of his heart, and that he spent half his time writing sonnets about a dead woman, she grew very indignant, and her tongue made anything but music in the poet's home. Dante soon became tired of her complaints, and disgusted with her railings.

He did not openly forsake her, but he was cold, and clung more fondly than ever to the memory of Beatrice; while he made up for his disappointment in domestic life, by devoting himself to literature and the service of his country.

With years several children came, but they do not seem to have drawn the pair any closer together. When their only daughter was born, Dante insisted on her being christened Beatrice, a circumstance which, to say the truth, was hardly calculated to smooth poor Gemma's temper.

When he was about twenty-eight, Dante finished his "*Vita Nuova*:" a collection of sonnets giving an account of the beginning and course of his love for Beatrice, and telling of his sorrow at her death. These sonnets are delicate and tender: but the chief charm in them lies in the human and natural way in which they bring close to us Dante's love for Beatrice. In the "*Paradiso*" this love grows too mystical for a certain class of minds to understand it, and from thence has arisen the erroneous idea entertained by some, that Beatrice is a mere myth.

Dante was now beginning to make himself known in public life: and he was appointed one of the Priors, which was the title of a certain number of magistrates who stood at the head of the Florentine Republic. He was never so peaceful and so prosperous as at this period of his life. Gemma, to do her justice, kept ease and plenty sitting at his fire-side. The grand melodies of the "*Divina Commedia*" were already echoing through his brain. He held an honourable position in that Florence he loved so well. He had around him men whose talents made them his congenial companions. We wish we could pause to dwell upon this brief hour of sunshine in Dante's story. We should have liked to linger in Giotto's studio when the great painter, with a loving and truthful hand, took the portrait of the greater poet. Perhaps, as evening fell, there would wander into the studio a man whose eyes looked weary, as if with close application to some fine work. This man, probably, generally had in his hand a small book, on the page of which some female saint, tiny as a fairy, but beautiful as a seraph, smiled forth from a golden cloud. In him we recognise Gubbio, the graceful illuminator, whose delicate artistic triumphs still enrich many an old monastic Italian library. Or, if Giotto thought Dante's face too sad and grave sometimes, for the picture to be successful, he may have called in one whose clear voice, mingling in dainty harmonies with the tones of his lute as he warbled some airy lay, would have made Despair herself smile. And surely Dante's brow was smoothed, and his eye grew brighter when "his Casella sang." But we must hasten on to darker days.

While Dante was in office as Prior, the rival factions of the Guelphs and Ghibellines were very restless and seditious in Florence. The Guelphs even went so far as to hold secret meetings, the object of

which was to admit Charles of Valois into the city. This conspiracy was discovered, and Dante was the most active of the Priors in punishing the offenders, many of whom he banished. The Guelphs were furious that one brought up in their ranks should treat them thus harshly : although, in reality, his public office made strict impartiality his imperative duty. His wife, also, thought herself much aggrieved because a relation of her own was among the exiles, and this fact added an extra sharpness to the acid drops that were distilled but too often beside the poet's hearth. This being the case he was not sorry to leave home for a time, and to be sent on an embassy to Rome to try and patch up matters with the Pope. The Guelphs, who were many of them now in power, took advantage of his absence to revenge themselves. They caused his property to be confiscated, and exiled him, as he had before exiled their friends.

From that day, Dante knew not a moment's rest or happiness. He wandered from one Italian Prince to another, seeking some patron in whose shadow he might sit down to finish his mighty poem. But the incense-laden atmosphere of courts suited little him who had been used to the free air of a republic ; and he never stayed long anywhere. Indeed, when we think of the keen sarcasm and the moody silence between which his behaviour in society is said at this time to have alternated, we cannot wonder that he made but a bad courtier. The fact was, his whole life was soured, and he did not choose to put sugar on his tongue to please men who were hardly fit to stand behind his chair, simply because they happened to have on ducal coronets. Sometimes utterly disgusted with both the world and its princes, he would retire to the lonely monastery of Santa Croce di Fonte Avellana. There, when the eagle screamed over head, and the wild wind wailed through the cloisters, and the black clouds gathered on some distant mountain top, the images of the "*Inferno*" became distinct in his mind. Or, when in summer twilight he lingered near the church as the monks intoned some sweet old hymn, the well known lines on evening, in the "*Purgatorio*," may have first whispered through his brain.

Wherever he might be, one bitter, yearning cry was, we know, always rising from Dante's heart : "Oh, Florence ! oh, my country, that I have served too well ! Would that I might go back to die within thy walls !"

Once, he was so beside himself with grief and anger that he actually entered the ranks of the German Emperor's army which was marching to besiege Florence. But when the dear familiar spires appeared in the distance, his heart smote him as a traitor, and he turned back. The Florentines would only consent to his return on the most humiliating conditions, and these he was too proud to comply with.

Gemma, in his absence meanwhile, was behaving nobly. She was as loyal to him as if he was present. She kept together the small

remains of his fortune, and even worked with her own hands to add to the scanty family store. No doubt many a silent tear fell from her eyes for him whom she had so often wronged when he was near, but who, now that he was far away, was loved so much better than ever.

Of the "Divina Commedia" we have no space to speak here. It is pleasant to think that even in his lifetime Dante enjoyed much fame. The poem was popular because it was written in the language of the common people, and for many other reasons independent of its real merits. Before his death, Dante found a true friend and generous patron at Ravenna, in Guido Da Polenta. By him he was sent on an embassy to Venice, which, however, failed. On his return to Ravenna, Dante was so grieved at his ill success in the business of his friend, that he fell ill, and died at the age of fifty-six. Some years after his death, his daughter Beatrice took the veil in a convent at Ravenna, probably, that she might be near his grave. There is something very pathetic in the thought of the lonely maiden stealing forth from her cloister to pray beside the tomb of her great father. That tomb Ravenna has always kept inviolate, though repentant Florence has never ceased to beg for the dust of her mightiest son.

ALICE KING.



FRIENDSHIP.

How truly poor is he who knows no pow'r
Of love, to solace him in sorrow's hour ;
Who does not feel the kindly soothing hand
Of some lov'd friend in ev'ry clime and land :
Whose eye ne'er kindles in its gladsome ray,
Nor welcomes friendship as the light of day ;
Whose heart can beat in unison with none,
But still alone his onward course doth run.
However rich, poor man, I pity thee
Who can no blessing in true friendship see :
With Croesus' wealth thou art a pauper still,
If love does not thine inmost being thrill.
Can any dross for God's chief gift atone ?
Oh ! lift thine eyes one moment to His throne !
Love is the watchword of the angels there,
And love should be the Christian's echo here.
An anchor firm and stedfast to the end
Is love, which binds the heart of friend to friend.

C. T. G.

A LIFE OF TROUBLE.

IT would have gone into the magazine last month, but that Duffham stopped it; telling me to write the other paper.

Mrs. Todhetley says that you may sometimes read a person's fortunes in their eyes. I don't know whether it's true. She holds to it that when the eyes have a sad, mournful expression naturally, their owner is sure to have a life of sorrow. Of course instances may be found: and Thomas Rymer's was one.

You can look back to March and read what was said of him: "A delicate-faced, thin man, with a rather sad expression and mild brown eyes. In spite of his poor clothes and his white apron, and the obscure shop he had served in for twenty years, his face had 'gentleman' plainly written in it; but he gave you the idea of being too meek-spirited; as if in any struggle with the world he could never take his own part." The sad expression was *in* the eyes: that was certain: thoughtful, dreamy, and would have been painfully sad but for its sweetness. But it's not given to everybody alike to discern this inward sadness in the look of another man.

It was of no avail to say that Thomas Rymer had brought trouble upon himself, and made his own fate. His father was a curate in Warwickshire, poor in pence, rich in children. Thomas was put apprentice to a doctor in Birmingham, who was also a chemist and druggist. Tom had to serve in the shop, take out teeth, make up the physic, and go round with his master to fevers and rheumatisms. While he was doing this, the curate died: and thenceforth Thomas would have to make his own way in the world, with not a soul to counsel him.

Of course he might have made it. But Fate, or Folly, was against him. Some would have called it fate, Mrs. Todhetley for one; others might have said it was folly.

Next door to the doctor's was a respectable pork and sausage shop, carried on by a widow, Mrs. Bates. Rymer took to go in there of an evening when he had the time, and sit in the parlour behind with Mrs. Bates and her two daughters. Failing money for theatres and concerts, knowing no friends to drop in at, young fellows drift away anywhere for relaxation when work is done. Mrs. Bates, a good old motherly soul, as fat as her best pig, bade him run in whenever he felt inclined. Rymer liked her for her hearty kindness, and liked uncommonly the dish of hot sausages that used to come on the table for supper. The worst was, he grew to like something else—and that was Miss Susannah.

If it's true that people are attracted by their contrasts, there might

have been some excuse for Rymer. He was quiet, and sensitive, with a refined mind and timid manners. Susannah Bates was free, loud, good-humoured, and vulgar. Some people, it was said, called her handsome then; but, judging by what she was later, we thought it must have been quite a broad style of handsomeness. The Miss Bateses were intended by their mother to be useful; but they preferred to be stylish. They played "Buy a broom" and other fashionable tunes on the piano, spent time over their abundant hair, wore silks for best, carried a fan to chapel on Sundays, and could not be persuaded to serve in the shop on the busiest day. Good Mrs. Bates managed that by the help of her foreman: a steady young man, whose lodgings were up a court hard by.

Well, Tom Rymer, the poor clergyman's son got to be as intimate in there as if it were his home, and he and Susannah struck up a friendship that continued all the years he was at the next door. Just before he was out of his time, Mrs. Bates died.

The young foreman somehow managed to secure the business for himself, and married the elder Miss Bates off-hand. There ensued some frightful squabbling between the sisters. The portion of money said to be due to Miss Susannah was handed to her, with a request that she should find herself another home. Rymer came of age just then, and the first thing he did was to give her a home himself by making her his wife.

There was the blight. His advance prospects were over from that day. The little money she had was soon spent: he must provide a living how he could. Instead of going on to qualify himself for a surgeon, he took a situation as a chemist and druggist's assistant: and later, set up for himself in a small shop at Timberdale. For the first ten years of his married life, he was always intending to pass the necessary examinations: each year saying it should be done the next. But expenses came on thick and fast; and that great need with everybody, present wants, had to be served first. He gave up the hope then: went on in the old jog-trot line, and subsided into an obscure rural chemist and druggist.

It's to be hoped you won't mind looking over the paper for March, or this may not be too intelligible. That son of Rymer's who had become a black sheep since he grew up, changed the bank note in the letter, and decamped. What with the stunning blow the discovery itself was to Mr. Rymer, and what with the concealment of the weighty secret—for he had to conceal it: he could not go and tell of his own son—it pretty nearly did for him. Rymer tried to make reparation in one sense—by the bringing of that five-pound bank note to the Squire. For which the Squire, ignorant of the truth, thought him a downright lunatic.

For some months after that evening, Thomas Rymer was to be seen

in his shop as usual, getting to look like a yellow ghost. Which Darbyshire, the Timberdale doctor, said was owing to the liver, and physicked him well.

But the physic did not answer. Of all obstinate livers, Darbyshire said, Rymer's was about the worst he'd ever had to do with. Some days he could not go into the shop at all, and Margaret, his daughter, had to serve the customers. She could make up prescriptions just as well as he did, and people grew to trust her. They had a good business. It was known that Rymer's drugs were genuine; had down direct from the fountain-head. He had given up the post-office, and the grocer's shop opposite had taken to it. In this uncertain way, a week sick, and a week tolerably well, Rymer continued to go on for about two years.

Margaret Rymer stood behind the counter: a neat little girl in gray merino. Her face was just like her father's; with the same delicate features, the sweet brown eyes, and the look of native refinement. Margaret belonged to his side of the house; there was not an atom of the Brummagem Bateses in her. The Squire, who remembered her grandfather the clergyman, said Margaret took after him. She was in her nineteenth year now, and for steadiness you might have given her ninety-nine, and trusted her alone all over the world and back again.

She stood behind the counter, making up some medicine. A woman in a coarse brown cloak with a showy cotton handkerchief tied on her head, was waiting for it. It had been a dull autumn day: evening was coming on, and the air felt chill.

"How much be it, please, miss?" asked the woman, as Margaret handed her the bottle of mixture, done up nicely in white paper.

"Eighteen-pence. Thank you."

"Be the master better?" the woman turned round from the door to enquire, as if the state of Mr. Rymer's health had been an after-thought.

"I think he is a little. He has a very bad cold and is lying in bed to-day. Thank you for asking. Good night."

When dusk came on, Margaret shut the street door and went to the parlour. Mrs. Rymer sat there writing a letter. Margaret just glanced in.

"Mother, can you listen to the shop, please?"

"I can if I choose—what should ail me?" responded Mrs. Rymer.

"Where are you off to, Margaret?"

"To sit with my father for a few minutes?"

"You needn't bother to leave the shop for that. I daresay he's asleep."

"I won't stay long," said Margaret. "Call me please, if any one comes in."

She escaped up the staircase, which stood in the nook between the

shop and the parlour. Thomas Rymer lay back in the easy chair by his bit of bed-room fire. He looked as ill as a man could, his face thin and sallow, the fine nose pinched, the mild brown eyes mournful.

"Papa, I did not know you were getting up," said Margaret in a soft low tone.

"Didn't you hear me, child?" was his reply—for the room was over the shop. "I've been long enough about it."

"I thought it was my mother stirring about up here."

"She has not been here all the afternoon. What's she doing?"

"I think she is writing a letter."

Mr. Rymer groaned—which might have been caused by the pain he complained of as always feeling. Mrs. Rymer's letters were few and far between; and written to one correspondent only—her son Benjamin. That Benjamin was random and getting a living in any chance way, or not getting one, and that he had never been at home for between two and three years, Margaret knew. But she knew no worse. The secret hidden between Mr. and Mrs. Rymer, that they never spoke of to each other, had been kept from her.

"I wish you had not got up," said Margaret. "You are not well enough to come down to-night."

He looked at her, rather quickly: and spoke after a pause.

"If I don't make an effort—as Darbyshire says—it may end in my being a confirmed invalid, child. I must get down while I can, Margaret; while I can."

"You will get better soon, papa; Mr. Darbyshire says so," she answered, quietly swallowing down a sigh.

"Ay, I know he does. I hope it will be so—please God. My life has been only a trouble throughout, Margaret; but I'd like to struggle with it yet for all your sakes."

Looking at him as he sat there, the fire-light playing upon his worn face with its subdued spirit, you might have seen it was true—that his life had been a continuous trouble. Was he born to it?—or did it only come upon him through marrying Susannah Bates? On the surface of things, lots seem very unequally dealt out in this world. What had been Thomas Rymer's? A poor son of a poor curate, he had known little but privation in his earlier years; then came the long drudgery of his working apprenticeship, then his marriage, and the longer drudgery of his life since. An uncongenial and unsuitable marriage—as he had felt to the back-bone. From twenty to thirty years had Rymer toiled in a shop late and early; never taking a day's rest or a day's holiday, for some one must be on duty always, and he had no substitute. Even on Sundays he must be at hand, lest his neighbours might be taken ill, and want drugs. If he went to church, there was no security that his servant maid—generally a fat young woman in her teens, with a black face, rough hair, and waving a dirty dish-cloth—would not astonish the

congregation by flying up to his pew door to call him out. Indeed the vision was not so very uncommon. Where, then, could have been Rymer's pleasure in life? He had none; it was all work. And upon this there came trouble.

Just as the daughter, Margaret, was like her father, so the son, Benjamin, resembled his mother. But for the difference of years, and that his red hair was short and hers long, he might have put on a cap, and sat for her portrait. He was the eldest of the children; Margaret the youngest; those between had died. Seven years between children makes a difference, and Margaret with her gentleness had always been afraid of rough Benjamin.

But whether a child's ugly or handsome, it's all the same to the parents; and for some years the only white spot in Thomas Rymer's life had been the love of his little Benjamin. For the matter of that, as a child, Ben was rather pretty. He grew up and turned out wild; and it was just as bad a blow as could have fallen upon Rymer: but when that horrible thing was brought home to him—the taking of the bank-note out of our letter, and the substituting of the stolen one for it—then Rymer's heart gave in. Ever since that time it had been as good as breaking.

Well, that was Thomas Rymer's lot in life. Some other people seem to have nothing but brightness. Do you know what Mrs. Todhetley says—that the greater the cloud here, the brighter will be the recompense hereafter. Looking at Thomas Rymer's face as the fire played on it,—its goodness of expression, almost that of a martyr; remembering his prolonged battle with the world's cares, and his aching heart; knowing how inoffensive he had been to his fellow creatures, ever doing them a good turn when it lay in his power, and never an ill one—one could but hope that his recompense would be of the largest.

"Had many in this afternoon, Margaret?"

"Pretty well, papa."

Mr. Rymer sighed. "When I get stronger ——"

"Margaret! Shop."

The loud coarse mouthful was Mrs. Rymer's. Margaret's spirit recoiled from it the least in the world. In spite of her having been brought up to the "shop," there had always been something in her native refinement that rebelled against it and against the having to serve in it.

"A haperth o' liquorish" was the large order from a small child, whose head did not come much above the counter. Margaret served it at once: the liquorice, being often in demand, was kept done up in readiness. The child laid down the halfpenny and went out with a bang.

"I may as well run over with the letter," thought Margaret—alluding to an order she had written to London for some drug they were out of.

"And there's my mother's. Mother," she added, going to the parlour door, "do you want your letter posted?"

"I'll post it myself when I do," replied Mrs. Rymer. "Ain't it a'most time you got the gas lighted? That shop must be in darkness."

It was, nearly. But the gas was never lighted until really needed, in the interests of economy. Margaret ran across the road, put her letter into the post, and ran back again. She stood for a moment at the door, looking at a huge lumbering caravan that was passing: a ménage on wheels, as seen by the light within its small windows. It must be on its way to Worcester fair, she thought.

"Is it you, Margaret? How d'ye do?"

Some great rough man had come up, and was attempting to kiss her. Margaret started back with a cry. She would have closed the door against him; but he was the stronger, and got in.

"Why, what possesses the child! Don't you know me?"

Every pulse within Margaret Rymer's body tingled to pain, as she recognised him. It was her brother Benjamin. Better, than this, that it had been what she fancied—some rude stranger, who in another moment would have passed on and been gone. Benjamin's coming was always the signal for discomfort at home: and Margaret felt half paralysed with dismay.

"How are the old folks, Maggie?"

"Papa is very ill," she answered, her voice slightly trembling. "My mother is well as usual. I think she was writing to you this afternoon."

"Governor ill! so I've heard. Up stairs a good deal, isn't he?"

"Quite half his time, I think."

"Who attends here?"

"I do."

"You!—you little mite! Brought your knowledge of rhubarb to good, eh? What's the matter with him?"

"He has not been well for a long while. I don't know what it is. Mr. Darbyshire says"—she dropped her voice a little—"that he is sure there's something on his mind."

"Poor old dad!—just like him. If a woman came in with a broken-arm, he'd take it to heart."

"Benjamin, I think it is *you* that he has most at heart," the girl took courage to say.

Mr. Benjamin laughed heartily. "Me! He needn't have me. I am as steady as old Time, Maggie. I've come home to stay; and I'll prove to him that I am."

"Come home to stay!" faltered Margaret.

"I can take care of things here. I am better able to do it than you."

"My father will not put me out of my place here," said Margaret steadily. "He has confidence in me: he knows I do things just as he does."

"And for that reason he makes you his substitute! Don't assume, Miss Maggie: you'd be more in place scrubbing out the saucepans than as the presiding genius in a drug-shop. Halloa! How d'ye do, mother?"

The sound of his voice had reached Mrs. Rymer. She did not believe her own ears, and came stealing forth to look, afraid of what she might see. To give Madam Rymer her due, she was quite as honest-natured as her husband; and the matter of the bank-note, the wrong use made of the keys she was foolish enough to surreptitiously lend Mr. Benjamin, had brought her no light shock at the time. Ill-conduct, in the shape of billiards, and beer, and idleness, she had found plenty of excuse for in her son: but when it came to felony, it was another thing. "It *is* him!" she muttered, as he saw her, and turned.

"Where on earth have you sprung from?" demanded Mrs. Rymer.

"Not from the skies, mother. Hearing the governor was on the sick list, I thought I ought to come over and see him."

"None of your lies, Ben," said Mrs. Rymer. "That has not brought you here. You are in some disgraceful mess again."

"It *has* brought me here—and nothing else. Ashton of Timberdale——"

A faint groan. A crash as of the breaking of glass. When they turned to look, there was Mr. Rymer—fallen against the counter in his shock of surprise and weakness. His arm had thrown down a slight-made empty syrup bottle.

And that's how Benjamin Rymer came home. His father and mother had never seen him since before the discovery of the trouble: for as soon as he had changed the bank-note in the letter, he was off. The affair had frightened him a little; that is, the stir made over it, which he had contrived to get notice of: since then he had been passably steady, making a living for himself in Birmingham. He had met Robert Ashton a short while ago—this was the account he now gave—heard from that gentleman rather a bad account of his father, and so thought it his duty to give up what he was about, and come home. His duty! Ben Rymer's duty!!

Ben was a tall, bony fellow, with a passably liberal education. Mr. Rymer had intended him for a surgeon, had taken him into his own shop to learn the compounding of medicines, intending him to go on to the higher branches later. Ben however showed himself very unsteady, idle, and quite unamenable to the parental control, so Mr. Rymer had transferred him to a brother chemist and druggist at Tewkesbury. There he fell into ill-companionship, and instead of the transfer being for the better, it turned out for the worse. Ben was turned from his place, and tried one or two others, coming home between whiles, and then going back to Tewkesbury again. His chosen friends there were worse than himself. Ben did not aid in robbing the butcher's till, he

had not quite come to that, neither was he privy to it; but he did get persuaded into trying to dispose of one of the stolen notes. It had been the one desperate act of his life, and for a while sobered him. Time however effaces impressions: from two to three years had gone on since; nothing had transpired, never so much as a suspicion fallen on Mr. Benjamin; and he grew bold and came home.

Timberdale rubbed its eyes with astonishment that next autumn day, when it woke up to see Benjamin Rymer in his father's shop, a white apron on, and serving the customers that went in, as naturally as though he had never left it. Where had he been all that while, they asked. Improving himself in his profession, coolly avowed Ben with unruffled face. And they took it in.

And so the one chance—rest of mind—for the father's uninterrupted return to health and life, went out. The prolonged time, passing without discovery, giving a greater chance day by day that it might never supervene, could but have a beneficial effect on Rymer. But when Ben made his appearance, put his head, so to say, into the very stronghold of danger, all his sickness and his fear came back again.

Ben did not know why his father kept so poorly and looked so ill. Never a word, in his sensitiveness, had Mr. Rymer spoken to his son of that past night's work. Ben might suspect, but he did not know. Mr. Rymer would come down when he was not fit, and take up his place in the shop on a stool. Ben made mocking fun of it: perhaps in sport more than ill-feeling: telling the customers to look at the old ghost there. Ben made himself perfectly at home; would sometimes hold a levée in the shop if his father was out of it, when he and his friends would talk and laugh the roof off: could noise have done it.

People talk of the troubles of the world, and say their name is legion: poverty, sickness, disappointment, disgrace, debt, difficulty: but there is no trouble the human heart can know like that brought by rebellious children. To old Rymer, with his capacity for taking things to heart, it had been like a long crucifixion. And yet—the instinctive love of a parent cannot die out: recollect David's grief for wicked Absalom. "Would God I had died for thee, my son, my son!"

Still, compared to what he used to be, Ben Rymer was steady. As the winter approached, there set in another phase of the reformation; for he pulled up even from the talking and laughing, and became as good as gold. You might have thought he had taken his dead grandfather the clergyman for a model, and was striving to walk in his steps. He went to church, read his medical works, was pleasant at home, gentle with Margaret, and altogether the best son in the world. "Will it last, Benjamin?" his father asked him sorrowfully. "It shall last, father; I promise it," was the earnestly-spoken answer. Ben kept his promise throughout the winter, and seemed likely to keep it always. Mr. Rymer grew stronger, and was in business regularly; which gave

Ben more time for his books. It was thought that a good time had set in for the Rymer: but, as Mrs. Todhetley says, you cannot control Fate.

I had to call at the shop one day for a box of what Mrs. Todhetley called "Household Pills:" Rymer's own making. When anybody was ailing at home, she'd administer a dose of these pills: two, or one, or half one, according to our ages and capacity for swallowing; for they were about as big as a small pumpkin. But that Rymer was so conscientious a man, I should have thought they were composed of bread and pepper. Mrs. Todhetley, however, pinned her faith to them, and said they did wonders.

Well, I had to go to Timberdale on other matters, and was told to call, when there, for a box of these delectable Household Pills. Mr. Rymer and his son stood behind the counter: the one making up his books, Ben pounding something in a mortar. Winter was just on the turn, and the trees and hedges were beginning to shoot into bud. Ben left his pounding to get the pills.

"Is this Mr. Rymer's? Halloo, Ben!—All right. How goes it, old boy?"

The door had been pushed open with a burst, and the above words were sent into our ears, in a tone not over steady. They came from a man who wore sporting clothes, and his hat so much aside that it seemed to be falling off his head. Ben Rymer stared in surprise, his mouth dropped.

But that it was early in the day, and one does not like to libel people, it might have been thought the gentleman had taken a little too much. He swaggered up to the counter, and held out his hand to Ben. Ben, just then wrapping up the box of pills, did not appear to see it.

"Had a hunt after you, old fellow," said the loud stranger. "Been to Birmingham and all kinds of places. Couldn't think where you'd hid yourself."

"You are back pretty soon," growled Ben, who certainly seemed not to relish the visit.

"Been back a month. Couldn't get on in the New World: its folks are too down for me. I say, I want a word with you. Can't say it here, I suppose."

"No," returned Ben, rather savagely.

"Just you come out a bit, Ben," resumed the stranger, after a short pause.

"I can't," replied Ben—and his tone sounded more like I won't. "I have my business to attend to."

"Bother business! Here goes, then: it's your fault if you make me speak before people. Gibbs has come out of hiding, and he's getting troublesome——"

"If you'll go outside and wait, I'll come to you," interrupted Ben at this, with summary quickness.

The man turned and swaggered out. Ben gave me the pills with one hand, and took off his apron with the other. Getting his hat, he was hastening out, when Mr. Rymer touched his arm.

"Who is that man, Benjamin?"

"A fellow I used to know in Tewkesbury, father."

"What's his name?"

"Cotton. I'll soon despatch him and be back again," concluded Ben, as he disappeared.

I put down half-a-crown for the pills, and Mr. Rymer left his place to give me the change. There had been a kind of consciousness between us, understood though not expressed, since the night when I had seen him giving way to his emotion in Crabb Ravine. This man's visit brought the scene back again. Rymer's eyes looked into mine, and then fell.

"Ben is all right now, Mr. Rymer."

"I couldn't wish him better than he is. It's just as though he were striving to make atonement for the past. I thought it would have killed me at the time."

"I should forget it."

"Forget it I never can. You don't know what it was, Mr. Johnny," he continued in a kind of frightened tone, a red spot of hectic coming into his pale thin cheeks, "and I trust you never will know. I never went to bed at night but to lie listening for a summons at my door—the officers searching after my son, or to tell me he was taken: I never rose up in the morning but my sick spirit fainted within me, as to what news the day might bring forth."

Mr. Benjamin and his friend were pacing side by side in the middle of the street when I got out, probably to be out of the reach of eavesdroppers. They did not look best pleased with each other; seemed to be talking sharply.

"I tell you I can't and I won't," Ben was saying, as I passed them in crossing over. "What do you come after me for? When a fellow wants to be on the square, you'll not let him. As to Gibbs——"

The voices died out of hearing. I went home with the pills, and thought no more about the matter.

Spring weather is changeable, as we English know. In less than a week, a storm of sleet and snow was drifting down. In the midst of it, who should present himself at Crabb Cott at mid-day but Lee the letter-carrier. His shaky old legs seemed hardly able to bear him up against the storm, as he came into the garden. I opened the door, wondering what he wanted.

"Please can I see the Squire in private, sir?" asked Lee, who was looking partly angry, partly rueful. Lee had never been in boisterous

spirits since the affair of the bank-note took place. Like a great many more people, he got fanciful with years, and could not be convinced but that the suspicion in regard to it lay on him.

"Come in out of the storm, Lee. What's up?"

"Please, Mr. Ludlow, sir, let me get to see the Squire," was all the answer.

The Squire was in his little room, hunting for a mislaid letter in the piece of furniture he called his bureau. It was the same bureau that—but we'll let that go for now. As I shut old Lee in, I heard him begin to say something about the bank-note and Benjamin Rymer. An instinct of the truth flashed over me—as sure as fate something connecting it with Ben had come out. In I shot again, to make one at the conference. The Squire was looking too surprised to notice me.

"It was Mr. Rymer's son who took out the good note and put in the bad one?" he exclaimed. "Take care what you say, Lee."

Lee stood outside the worn hearth-rug; his old hat, covered with flakes of snow, held between his two hands. The Squire had put his back against the bureau and was staring at him through his spectacles, his nose and face of a finer red than ordinary.

The thing had been tracked home to Benjamin Rymer by the man, Cotton, Lee explained in a rambling kind of tale. Cotton, incensed at Rymer's not helping him to some money—which was what he had come to Timberdale to ask for—had told in revenge of the past transaction. He had not been connected with it, but knew of the part taken in it by Rymer.

"I don't believe a syllable of it," said the Squire stoutly, flinging himself into his bureau chair, which he twisted round to face the fire. "You can sit down, Lee. Where did you say you heard this?"

Lee had heard it at the "Plough-and-harrow," where the man, Cotton had been staying. Jelf, the landlord, had had it, told him by Cotton himself, and Jelf in his turn had whispered it to Lee. That was last night: and Lee had come bursting up with it now to Mr. Todhetley.

"I tell you, Lee, I don't take in a syllable of it," repeated the Squire.

"It be true as gospel, sir," asserted Lee. "Last night, when I went in to Jelf's for a drop o' beer, being a most stiff all over with the cold, I found Jelf in a passion because a guest had gone off without paying part of his score, leaving nothing but a letter to say he'd send it. Cotton by name, Jelf explained, and a sporting gent to look at. A good week, Jelf vowed he'd been there, living on the best. And then Jelf said I had no cause to be looked down upon any longer, for it was not me that had done that trick with the bank-notes, but Benjamin Rymer."

"Now just you stop, Lee," interrupted the Squire. "Nobody looked down upon you for it, or suspected you: neither Jelf nor other people. I have said it to you times enough."

"But Jelf knows I thought they did, sir. And he told me this news to put me a bit at my ease. He ——"

"Jelf talks at random when his temper's up," cried the Squire. "If you believe this story, Lee, you'll believe anything."

"Ben Rymer was staying at home at the time, sir," continued Lee, determined to have his say. "If he is steady now, it's known what he was then. He must have got access to the letters somehow, while they lay at his father's, and opened yours and changed the note. Cotton says he had had the stolen note hid about him for ever-so-long, waiting for an opportunity to get rid of it."

"Do you mean to accuse Rymer of being one of the thieves that robbed the butcher's till?" demanded the Squire, getting wrathful.

"Well, sir, I don't go as far as that. The man told Jelf that one of the stolen notes was given to Rymer to pass, and he was to have a pound for himself if he succeeded in doing it."

The Squire would hardly let him finish. "Cotton said this to Jelf, did he!—and Jelf rehearsed it to you?"

"Yes, sir. Just that much."

"Now look you here, Lee. First of all, who have you repeated this tale to?"

"Not to anybody," answered Lee. "I thought I'd better bring it up here, sir, to begin with."

"And you'd better let it stop here to end with," retorted the Squire, "That's my best advice to you, Lee. My goodness! Accuse a respectable man's son of what might transport him, on the authority of a drunken fellow who runs away from an inn without paying his bill! The likeliest thing is that this Cotton did it himself. How else should he know about it? Don't you let your tongue carry this further, Lee; or you may find yourself in the wrong box."

Lee looked just a little staggered. A faint flush appeared in his withered face. The Squire's colour was at its fiercest. He was hard at the best of times to take in extraordinary tales, and utterly scouted this. There was no man he had a greater respect for than Thomas Rymer.

"I hoped you might be for prosecuting, sir. It would set me right with the world."

"You are a fool, Lee. The world has not thought you wrong yet. Prosecute! I! Upon this cock-and-bull story! Mr. Rymer would prosecute me in turn, I expect, if I did. You'd better not let this get to his ears: you might lose your post."

"Mr. Rymer, sir, must know how wild his son have been."

"Wild! Most of the young men of the present day are that, as it seems to me," cried the Squire in his heat. "Mine had better not let me catch them at it, though. I'd warm their ears well beforehand if I thought they ever would. Do you hear, Mr. Johnny?"

I had been leaning on the back of a chair in the quietest corner for fear of being sent away. When the Squire put himself up like this, he'd say anything.

"To be a bit wild is one thing, Lee; to commit felony quite another: Rymer's son would be no more guilty of it than you would. It's out of all reason. And do you take care of your tongue. Look here, man, suppose I took this up, as you want me, and it was found to have been Cotton or some other jail-bird that did it, instead of young Rymer: where would you be? In prison for defamation of character, if the Rymer's chose to put you there. Be wise in time, Lee, and say no more."

"It might have been as you say, sir—Cotton himself; though I'm sure that never struck me," returned Lee, veering round to the argument. "One thing that made me believe it, was the knowing that Ben Rymer might easily get access to the letters."

"And that's just the reason why you should have doubted it," contradicted the Squire. "He'd be afraid to touch them because of the ease. Forgive you for coming up, you say?" added the Squire, as Lee rose with some humble words of excuse. "Of course I will. But don't you forget that a word of this, dropped abroad, might put your place, as letter-man, in jeopardy. It's cold to-day, isn't it?"

"Frightful cold, sir."

"And you could come through it with this improbable story! Use your sense another time, Lee. Here, Johnny; take Lee into the kitchen and tell them to give him some cold beef and beer."

I handed him over, with the order, to Molly; who went into one of her tantrums at it, for she was in the midst of pastry-making. The Squire was sitting with his head bent, looking as perplexed as an owl, when I got back to the room.

"Johnny—shut the door. Something has got into my mind. Do you recollect Thomas Rymer's coming up one evening, and wanting to give me a five-pound note?"

"Quite well, sir."

"Well; I—I am not so sure now that there's nothing in this fresh tale."

I sat down; and in a low voice told him all. Of the sobbing fit in which I had found Rymer that same night in the Ravine; and that I had known all along it *was* the son who had done it.

"Bless my heart!" cried the Squire softly, very much taken aback. "It's that perhaps that has been making Rymer so ill."

"He said it was slowly killing him, sir."

"Mercy on him!—poor fellow! An ill-doing scapegrace of a rascal! Johnny, how thankful we ought to be when our sons turn out well, and not ill! But I think a good many turn out ill now a days. If ever you should live to have sons, sir, take care how you bring them up."

"I think Mr. Rymer must have tried to bring Ben up well," was my answer.

"Yes; but did the mother?" retorted the Squire quick as lightning. "More lies with them than with the father, Johnny. Take care, sir, who you choose for a wife when the time comes. Johnny, that Cotton must be an awful blackguard."

"I hope he'll live to know it."

"Look here, we must hush this up," cried the Squire, sinking his voice and glancing round the room. "I'd not bring fresh pain on poor Rymer for the world. You must forget that you've told it me, Johnny."

"Yes, that I will."

"It's only a five-pound note after all. And if it were fifty pounds, I'd not stir in it. No, nor for five hundred; be hanged if I would. It's not me that would bring the world about Thomas Rymer's ears. I knew his father and respected him, Johnny; though his sermons were three quarters of an hour long, if they were a minute; and I respect Thomas Rymer. You and I must keep this close. And I'll make a journey to Timberdale when this snow-storm's gone, Johnny; and frighten Jelf out of his life for propagating libellous tales."

That's where it ought to have ended. The worst is, "oughts" don't go for much in the world: as perhaps every reader of this paper has learned to know.

When Lee appeared the next morning with the letters as usual, I went out to him. He dropped his voice to speak as he put them in my hand.

"They say Benjamin Rymer is off, sir."

"Off where?"

"Somewhere out of Timberdale."

"Off for what?"

"I don't know, sir, Jelf accused me of having carried tales there, and called me a jackass for my pains. He said that what he had told me wasn't meant to be repeated again, and I ought not to have gone canking it about, specially to the Rymers themselves; that it might not be true——"

"As the Squire said, yesterday, you know, Lee."

"Yes, sir. I answered Jelf that it couldn't have been me that had gone canking to the Rymers, for I had not as much as seen them. Any way, he said, somebody had, for they knew of it, and Benjamin had gone off in consequence. Jelf's as cross over it as two sticks put cornerwise. It's his own fault: why did he tell me if it wasn't true?"

Lee went off—looking cross also. After breakfast I related this to the Squire. He didn't seem to like it, and walked about thinking.

"Johnny, I can't stir in it, you see," he said, presently. "If it got abroad, people might talk about compromising a felony, and all that sort of rubbish. You must go. See Rymer: and make him understand—"

without telling him in so many words, you know—that there's nothing to fear from me, and he may call Ben back again. If the young man has set-in to lead a new life, heaven forbid that I, having sons myself, should be a stumbling-block in the way of it."

It was striking twelve when I got to Timberdale. Margaret said her father was poorly: having gone out in the storm of the previous day, and got a chill. He was in the parlour alone, cowering over the fire. In the last few hours he seemed to have aged years. I shut the doors.

"What has happened?" I whispered. "I have come on purpose to ask you."

"That which I have been dreading all along," he said in a quiet, hopeless tone. "Benjamin has run away. He got some information, it seems, from the landlord of the 'Plough-and-harrow,' and was off the next hour."

"Well now, the Squire sent me to you privately, Mr. Rymer, to say that Ben might come back again. He has nothing to fear."

"The Squire knows it, then!"

"Yes. Lee came up about it yesterday: Jelf had talked to him. Mr. Todhetley did not believe a word: he blew up Lee like anything for listening to such a tale; he means to blow up Jelf for repeating anything said by a vagabond like Cotton. Lee came round to his way of thinking. Indeed there's nothing to be afraid of. Jelf is eating his words. The Squire would not harm your son for the world."

Rymer shook his head. He did not doubt the Squire's friendly feeling, but thought it was out of his hands. He told me all he knew about it.

"Benjamin came to me yesterday morning in a great flurry, saying something was wrong, and he must absent himself. Was it about the bank-note, I asked—and it was the first time a syllable in regard to it had passed between us," broke off Mr. Rymer. "Jelf had given him a friendly hint of what had dropped from the man Cotton—you were in the shop that first day when he came in, Mr. Johnny—and Benjamin was alarmed. Before I had time to collect my thoughts, or say further, he was gone."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know. I went round at once to Jelf: and the man told me all. Jelf knows the truth; that is quite clear. He says he has spoken only to Lee; is sorry now for having done that; and he will hush it up as far as he can."

"Then it will be quite right, Mr. Rymer. Why should you be taking it in this way?"

"I am ill," was all he answered. "I caught a chill going round to the 'Plough-and-harrow.' So far as mental sickness goes, we may battle with it to the end, strength from Above being lent to us; but when it takes a bodily shape—why there's nothing for it but giving in."

—Even while we spoke, he was seized with what seemed like an ague

fit. Head, and legs, and arms, and teeth, and the chair he sat in; all shook together. Mrs. Rymer appeared with some scalding-hot broth, and I said I'd run for Darbyshire.

A few days went on, and then news came up to Crabb Cot that Mr. Rymer lay dying. Robert Ashton, riding back from the hunt in his scarlet coat and white cords on his fine gray horse (the whole a mass of splashes with the thaw) pulled up at the door to say How d'ye do; and mentioned it amidst other items. It was just a shock to the Squire, and nothing less.

"Goodness preserve us!—and all through that miserable five-pound note, Johnny!" he cried in a wild flurry. "Where's my hat and top-coat?"

Away to Timberdale by the short cut through the Ravine, never heeding the ghost—although its traditional time of appearing, the dusk of evening, was drawing on—went the Squire. He thought Rymer must be ill through fear of him; and he accused me of having done my errand of peace badly.

It was quite true—Thomas Rymer lay dying. Darbyshire was coming out of the house as the Squire reached it, and said so. Instead of being sorry, he flew in a passion and attacked the doctor.

"Now look you here, Darbyshire—this won't do. We can't have people dying off like this for nothing. If you don't cure him, you had better give up doctoring."

"How d'ye mean for nothing?" asked Darbyshire, who knew the Squire well.

"It can't be for much: don't be insolent. Because a man gets a bit of anxiety on his mind, is he to be let die?"

"I've heard nothing about anxiety," said Darbyshire. "He caught a chill through going out that day of the snow-storm, and it settled on a vital part. That's what ails him, Squire."

"And you can't cure the chill! Don't tell me."

"Before this time to-morrow, Thomas Rymer will be where there's neither killing nor curing," was the answer. "I told them yesterday to send for the son: but they don't know where he is."

The Squire made a rush through the shop and up to the bed-room, hardly saying, With your leave, or By your leave. Thomas Rymer lay in bed at the far end; his white face whiter than the pillow; his eyes sunken; his hands outside, plucking at the counterpane. Margaret left the room when the Squire went in. He gave one look; and knew that he saw Death there.

"Rymer, I'd almost have given my own life to save you from this," cried he in the shock. "Oh, my goodness! what's to be done?"

"I seem to have been waiting for it all along; to have seen it coming," said Thomas Rymer, his faint fingers resting in the Squire's strong ones. "And now that it's here, I can't do battle with it."

"Now, Rymer, my poor fellow, couldn't you—*couldn't* you make a bit of an effort to live. To please me: I knew your father, mind. It can't be right that you should die."

"It must be right; perhaps it's well. I can truly say with old Jacob that few and evil have the days of my life been. Nothing but disappointment has been my lot here; struggle upon struggle, pain upon pain, sorrow upon sorrow. I think my merciful Father will remember it in the last Great Account."

He died at five o'clock in the morning. Lee told us of it when he brought up the letters. The Squire let fall his knife and fork.

"It's a shame and a sin, though, Johnny, that sons should inflict this cruel sorrow upon their parents," he said later. "Rymer has been brought down to the grave by his before his hair was gray. I wonder how *their* accounts will stand at the Great Reckoning?"

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

P.S. I want a holiday—If I can get it, there'll not be a paper from me next month.



SANCHA.

"SANCHÁ, my darling! This time you shall not escape; you shall not fly away like a little frightened bird."

A pause, and then a few syllables of murmured protest followed these words, which, abrupt and foolish as they read here, had been uttered in tones of impassioned fervour.

"The Marquesa has no control over me. Sancha, darling, do you not trust me? Only let me hear you say 'Duarte, I love you!' only once."

It was clearly a conversation at which I was not required to assist, and I hastily turned down another walk in the garden. I had recognised the voices as those of the young Baron Tejal and the pretty Sancha Folcado, humble companion to his sister, the cold, proud Donna Camilla, widowed Marquesa Logrono.

We resided in a western suburb of Lisbon, called Buenos Ayres. Our house stood high, and faced a *calçada* that sloped steeply down towards the principal thoroughfare between Lisbon and Belem, running parallel to the river. From the window where I generally sat at my work, I could see through the geraniums and heliotropes on the balcony, down the *calçada*, where the sun gleamed hot on the slippery blocks of native marble that stood in lieu of pavement, to a large fountain at the corner of the main street. I could see the Gallegos filling their gaily painted barrels; and the cries of "*quim quiere agoa fresca!*" echoed up the hill, with refreshing sound. On each side of this *calçada* were "palacios," as they were called; large, white, many-windowed houses, with great, green, double-winged doors, through which the lumbering carriages could drive to the foot of the broad marble stairs leading to the dwelling-rooms.

In one of the largest of these mansions lived the Baron Tejal, and with him his sister. To the back of the house were magnificent gardens, and those who were on Donna Camilla's visiting list, were privileged to walk there, or to bring their work to the square marble terrace overlooking the bright Tagus and the Alem Tego mountains: a terrace where was a flashing fountain all shaded and overhung with a luxuriance of Cape jessamine, that caught the cool drops on its dark polished leaves, and pink-tipped richly scented flowers, and tossed them up sparkling to the sun.

Donna Camilla and several of her friends were on the terrace, and in their conversation I was not much interested. Donna Camilla was

an olive-complexioned, hard-featured woman, about thirty years of age, whose profound ignorance upon every possible subject was only equalled by her pride and superstition. She had set her mind upon her brother's marriage with a bride she had chosen for him amongst the English residents. There was at Lisbon at that time a Lady Ashurst and her daughter, whom the Marquesa much esteemed. Lady Ashurst was almost as illiterate as Donna Camilla herself; but she was also vulgar, which Donna Camilla was not. Lady Ashurst was the widow of a north country manufacturer who had been knighted for some reason or other, and Donna Camilla was firmly persuaded that her ladyship belonged to the English aristocracy; her vulgarity was set down to insular eccentricity, and I frequently smiled to hear Donna Camilla airing provincialisms caught from her friend as choice phrases of idiomatic English. Lady Ashurst was very rich, there was no mistake about that; and Patty, the only child, was heiress to all the wealth. She was short, fat, and red-haired, and we used to call her, rather irreverently, "the golden ball." This golden ball, Donna Camilla was desirous her brother should secure to himself.

Tired of the inane talk that was going on, I had left the terrace, and wandered down a shady berceau, when I overheard the fragment of conversation I have repeated. We liked the Baron; he was an agreeable, courteous, rather sentimental young man, with a slight, graceful figure, and dreamy dark eyes; quite a hero of romance in Sancha's eyes I have no doubt. Sancha was very lovely, one of those faces that remind us of peris or houris, or any of those imaginary Eastern beings; she was also lively and intelligent. Donna Camilla treated her with favour, keeping her by her side, and introducing her to the company that assembled at the house. She was a great acquisition, for she sang delightfully, and was altogether a charming little person. I had before suspected what now I knew—that the Baron's affections inclined more towards Sancha's bright eyes than towards the golden charms of Miss Ashurst; and I trembled for the poor girl; there was an expression in the Marquesa's eyes and lips that showed she could be both cruel and unrelenting.

After that day spent in the Baron's garden, I went to stay a fortnight at a friend's quinta, to be present at the vintage; but in the midst of that gay and exciting scene, my mind often adverted to pretty little Sancha and that dangerous love-making of Dom Duarte's. I went to the Marquesa's open-evening the week I returned to town, and my eyes immediately sought Sancha; but in vain; she was not present. I moreover noticed that the Baron was pale, melancholy, distrait. I took an opportunity of inquiring of Donna Camilla after her missing favourite, but was met by a drawing-in of the thin lips and a dark frown, with an intimation that Sancha Folcado was no more to be spoken of in that house; and she added a few words that horrified me, but that I

did not believe. Sancha was gone; that at any rate was true; driven out in disgrace as I could clearly perceive.

Then came on the rainy season; when the water rushed and roared down the calçada, sweeping away the dust and earth that had accumulated about the marble blocks during the summer, and leaving them white and glittering. There was no roaming in the Baron's garden; no going out at all. The Martinmas summer followed, and nature sprang out afresh like Aphrodite rising from the waters; and our walks were resumed.

The Baron seldom appeared amongst us now; he was evidently in deep dejection; he used to pace up and down the most solitary paths, or lean over the terrace wall gazing at the river for the hour together without speaking. If Donna Camilla had thought to win her brother over to her project by sending Sancha away, she had failed completely. I felt impatient with Dom Duarte; I could not understand why he should go mooning about, instead of boldly following his lady love—for I took it for granted she had been sent home to her father—a sort of gentleman farmer, if growing vines and olives can properly be called farming, near Busilhas. I thought to myself that Sancha was worthy of a bolder lover.

On the site where the cathedral now stands, was once a Moorish mosque of large size; this had been converted into a Christian church but had subsequently been shattered by earthquake. The present smaller cathedral was then erected on part of the ancient site, but behind the modern building are remains of massive walls, and horse-shoe arches, and courts where orange-trees grow. A flight of broken steps leads to the top of one of the old walls, so broad, that a few poor cottages have found a nestling place there. One of these tiny vine-covered dwellings belonged, when I was there, to the keeper of the sacred crows of St. Vincente, who resided in the odour of sanctity in one of the courts below. The keeper was a good-natured little man, and I easily obtained permission to make a sketch of his picturesque cottage and of part of the Moorish ruins.

One morning I proceeded to avail myself of his permission with my sketching-book and colours. As I turned an angle of the ruins to reach the point of view I wished to take for my picture, a slight figure clothed in black and closely veiled darted past me, and entering one of the cottages I have mentioned, closed the door after her. The apparition startled me, the place was so retired; the rustle of silk and the flutter of lace seemed as much out of place there as my own appearance doubtless was to the aboriginal inhabitants.

The next day I returned to complete my sketch. I was just touching in the scarlet geraniums that grew so luxuriantly about the old arches, forming a covert for the wild birds that flew in and out with chirp and twitter, when I was surprised by hearing my name pronounced

in a sweet, low voice—a voice that I knew. I started up, throwing down my sketching-materials in my eagerness, and turning, clasped Sancha in my arms. She looked up in my face tearfully, tremblingly.

“Oh, I am so glad!” she cried. “You do not believe it then, that horrible thing she said of me?”

As I seated myself again, leaving room for her beside me, she sank at my feet, looking at me with pleading, piteous eyes. “You do not believe it?” she repeated.

“Not one word,” said I, drawing her on to the seat beside me. She pressed her lips on my hand as it held hers, and then laid her cheek against it with the caressing action of a child.

“But Sancha, I am so surprised! How do you happen to be here in this queer out-of-the-way nook? I quite thought—I hoped that you were at home with your father.”

“Ah, no!” she exclaimed with a frightened expression. “If he knew he would be so unhappy! Besides, how could I go? How could I get there all by myself?”

This was true when I came to think of it. There was no railroad, not even a stage coach; nothing but a road for mules. How could the poor little thing travel all by herself, when even I, little as I cared for what people said or thought in a general way, did not dare to venture even this far, without my factotum, Manoel, at my back; was he not hanging about the cathedral waiting to escort me home, even now? How could she go indeed?

Sancha's tears began to fall at mention of her father. I comforted her as well as I could, and then begged her to tell me all that had happened, and to let me try if I could not help her in some way.

We were sitting upon a block of stone thrown down by the earthquake's throes long ago, with no auditors but the birds. The wall of the cathedral rising up blank and massive, threw its shadow over us as we sat; the noise of the city was only heard afar off, like the murmur of the distant sea; and there Sancha told me all. How Dom Duarte had wooed her and sought her love; how Donna Camilla had discovered it, and had driven her from the house with such words as no woman ought to use to another; how she had fled in the dusk of the evening, and taken refuge here, with an old woman who had been her mother's nurse.

“And Dom Duarte? does he know where you are?”

“No!” she exclaimed: “I did not think so much of the difference between us at first; but now I know he can never marry a poor girl like me. If I were to let him follow me, what would he think of me? You will not tell him, Menina?”

No—I would not tell him; yet, at any rate. I understood the cause of his melancholy now, and thought it as well that he should suffer a

little longer, till he had proved what metal he was made of. "But your father, Sancha?" I asked, after a few minutes' silence.

"My father knows nothing," she replied hastily. "See," she added, taking a letter from her pocket, "this came the very day that cruel woman found out that Dom Duarte loved me." She spoke the last words in a low tone, lingering over them as if they were very sweet to her; I could see plainly enough that the dark-eyed young Baron had not spoken in vain.

I pressed her little hand as I took the letter she wished me to read; such a loving letter! written by one little accustomed to the pen perhaps, but so good, so tender, with a dash of the poetical withal. "The roses are blooming and the birds are singing just as when thou wert here, Sanchita minha;" so it ran. "But the flowers have no perfume, the bird's song no sweetness to thy old father while his darling is away. It is more than a year since thou hast left me, querida—too long for the few years I may have to live; come back to me; come back that I may hold thee in my arms and bless thee once more. If thou dost not come, I shall seek thee: for life without my Sanchita is empty."

"Have you answered this?" I inquired.

"Yes," she replied. "I answered it after I came here,—I told him that I was happy—that they were kind to me—that I did not wish to leave."

"But, Sancha—was not that wrong?"

"Wrong, to try to keep one we love from being unhappy?" She lifted her lovely eyes to mine, inquiringly.

"I think, dear, it is always wrong to deceive, even from a kind and loving motive."

"What would you have me do?"

"Tell the truth, and trust in God," I answered.

Mass was being celebrated in the cathedral; while we were talking we heard strains of music; and now the "Salutaris Hostia" rose and swelled in the air. I held my breath to listen; Sancha listened too, and crossed herself; then she looked at me.

"Ah!" she whispered, "you are so good, and yet you are a heretic."

"We had better not talk too much about any one's goodness," I replied; and then I thought for a minute. My first impulse was to take Sancha home with me; but in that case I could not keep her concealed from the Baron, who was in the habit of calling in at unexpected times. As for any quarrel with Donna Camilla, that gave me no concern. "Tell me," I said at last, "is old Padrilla good to you?"

"Oh, yes! very good—very kind." Another pause.

"Sancha, will you trust me?"

"Have I not trusted you?"

"Let me write to your father; you ought to be with him; if he knew all he would certainly come for you."

Sancha changed colour, and hung her head. "He would be so unhappy," she persisted.

"But he must know. It is no use to go on trying to deceive him, even putting the question of right on one side; and if he should come to Lisbon—if he should hear the Marquesa's story first?"

"Ai Maria!" Sancha exclaimed, becoming perfectly white with terror. "Yes, write—write! He will believe you; they say the English tell the truth."

I made her give me her father's address, and then I rose hastily to go, for I saw Manoel's face peeping in at the archway far down below, and knew that he had come to warn me that it was time to return home, before the sun attained the meridian. Sancha noticed him, and drew her veil closely over her face. I embraced her, promising to see her again in a few days; then I descended the steep flight of broken steps, and joined my attendant, listening penitently to his remonstrances about the risk of exposing myself to the noon-day sun.

I was sitting at my window, all in cool white, thinking of my morning's adventure. I had written my letter to Senhor Folcado; I was sure the best thing for Sancha would be to return home to her father; then, when she was under proper protection, the Baron might be told where she was to be found, and if his love was worth anything, he might follow her, and ask her of her father in a manly, straightforward manner.

I was leaning my cheek on my hand, with my face turned towards the open window, while these reflections were passing through my mind. All at once, my attention was attracted by a person issuing from the doorway of the *palacio Tejal*. He was an old man with gray hair hanging upon his shoulders; he was dressed in the garb of a countryman, with leather gaiters, embroidered jacket, scarlet sash, and high-crowned hat. This costume proved him not a Lisbonese, for the city folk all affected the French fashions; but this was not what fixed my gaze: *quinteiros* and *vinhodoros* were common enough to be seen. It was the countenance and manner of the man that startled me; he reeled from the door almost like one intoxicated, and then he looked up at the front of the house, raising his arms with a wild gesture, as if calling down a curse upon it. Then he walked rapidly away down the *calçada*, still gesticulating vehemently, and striking the ground now and then fiercely with the staff he held in his hand.

The conviction came across me like a lightning flash. It was Folcado, Sancha's father; and he had heard the Marquesa's story. My heart seemed to stand still for the moment. "What might be the consequences if he were to find Sancha in his present mood? I knew the hot blood of these men; I knew he would be capable of striking

his daughter to the earth in his wrath, before any explanation could be given.

I started up breathlessly. To have rushed down the street in my flowing white robes, at the risk of being taken for a ghost or a lunatic would have been a small matter; but he had far the start of me, and was striding along faster than I could run. I seized the hand-bell, and rang it violently, then hurried to the door, calling "Manoel—Manoel!" But when I heard Manoel come lumbering up-stairs at the summons, it all at once struck me—What was it I was going to say or do? In the first place, this man whom I had seen must already be lost in the crowded thoroughfare; and how did I know after all that he was Sancha's father? It was only my own imagination that had led me to such a conclusion—there was nothing to be done, as it appeared.

"It was a mistake—some one I thought I saw—never mind," said I to my factotum, as I dismissed him to the garlic and tobacco smoke-imbued existence he carried on in the basement. But for myself—I could not rest. I took up my book and laid it down again a dozen times, and was glad when dinner-time came and our family assembled round the table, that I might be diverted from my own thoughts.

The day's adventures however, were not thus to end. The gentlemen of our party had an engagement that evening. I was alone in the drawing-room. I had been trying over some new music by way of passing the time, and had just risen from the piano, when the ominous sound of a bell struck upon my ear. I knew the sound well, and never heard it without a shudder. It was the sign that the priests from the neighbouring church of St. Sacramento do Lapo were carrying the viaticum, to some one who was dying.

I went to the window, and lifting the curtain looked out. The moon was shining brightly. I saw the procession distinctly; the incense burners in front, the Host borne under a canopy. The bearers were hurrying fast—fast. It was evidently a case that admitted of no delay. I turned sick at heart with fear and foreboding, as I saw the great gates of the palacio Tejal thrown open to receive the procession; at the same instant I heard that indescribable sound—something resembling "pitchu"—a Portuguese makes when he wishes to attract your attention. Turning round I saw Manoel standing in the doorway. Finding that I was alone, he advanced into the room.

Did Menina know the dreadful thing that had happened?

No, I did not know, and I was too frightened to ask: I could only sink into my seat and stare.

"The poor young Baron—Holy Maria! what harm had he ever done to deserve such a fate?" and Manoel stopped to cross himself. "Ai, but it was sad!"

"What is it?" I asked, at length finding voice.

"Dom Duarte—he has been brought home desperately wounded—

dying, no doubt. May God and his saints have mercy on his soul!" And again Manoel crossed himself devoutly.

I covered my face with my hands, as if I could thus shut out from my imagination the object presented to it. Oh, poor Sancha! who was to be the bearer of this dreadful news to her? As for the perpetrator of the deed, there was not a shadow of a question! Ah! what evil the pride and heartlessness of that woman, Donna Camilla, had effected! How would she feel now, when she saw her young brother dying before her—when she found what her evil-speaking had done?

I could not sleep that night, but counted the hours till daylight came and brought the morning, when inquiries might be made at the palacio Tejal. During the night, I had noticed a light burning in one of the windows: it was now and then obscured by the shadow of some one passing to and fro. The windows were open on the first floor; I knew by this that Dom Duarte was not dead. No; not dead; that was all that could be said when the messenger returned. The surgeon from the English ship-of-war had been sent for; I was glad of that; I knew he could not be in better hands.

As soon as breakfast was over, I summoned Manoel and bade him prepare to accompany me again to the ruins. The man stared with wide open eyes as I handed him my portfolio. I have no doubt he thought that Menina must have turned thoroughly heartless all of a sudden, to be thinking of sketching, whilst a friend and neighbour lay at death's door. However, he made no comment, though I espied a shrug of the shoulders when he thought my back was turned.

Dismissing Manoel at the gateway as usual, I ascended the steps with a sinking heart. I determined to tell Sancha, in part, what had occurred, softening the danger as much as I could. Ill news proverbially flies fast; I knew old Pedrilla was an inveterate gossip, and thought she would be sure to hear of the event, and equally sure to repeat it in an exaggerated form. Of my suspicions as to the doer of the deed, I resolved to say nothing. After all they were only suspicions, and there was no need to add to Sancha's grief.

As soon as I appeared on the terrace, Sancha came flying to meet me. I told her what I had to say, as gently as I could. I was only just in time; for before I had finished speaking, Pedrilla came up from the fountain, full of exclamations and outcries. It was all I could do to keep Sancha quiet. I assured her that I was not deceiving her. Dom Duarte was in danger, but not dead, as Pedrilla had heard. There might be hope yet. I held her fast; for in her wild grief she wanted to rush off to the palacio Tejal; I could see in her eyes, in her quivering lips, that she, too, knew how it had happened.

I soothed her and reasoned with her as well as I could; pointing out that she would probably be repulsed from the door, and if not, if permitted to see Dom Duarte, that her presence instead of being of

service to him, might produce agitation. I promised to bring her news daily, and at last she wept on my shoulder a storm of tears that brought relief and calmness.

I was grieved to leave her, but could not venture to remain too long; it was most important that her place of concealment should remain undiscovered till her father could be communicated with, and receive the assurance of her innocence.

There was another difficulty; would Senhor Folcado ever receive the letter I had despatched? would he go home? or was it not more probable that he was wandering about in search of his daughter?—with what possible intention I shuddered to think. With strict charges to Pedrilla—little likely to be attended to, however—not to let Sancha be disturbed by reports that were just as likely to be false as true, I took my departure homewards. The sun had been blazing down from an unclouded sky all morning; the heat was unusually great for October. I felt oppressed and wearied, and my feet seemed scarcely able to support my weight. There was no conveyance at hand, and, really afraid of fainting, I lifted the crimson cloth curtain that shaded the doorway of the church of Nossa Senhora do Cabo, and entered to rest awhile in the cool interior.

I sank down on a *prie-dieu* near a column, leaving Manoel free to repeat a few *aves* if he chose. The church appeared almost dark, coming in from the brilliant light outside; it was some time before my eyes became sufficiently accustomed to the obscurity to distinguish objects. I fancied once or twice I heard a sound as of some one in grief or pain, and looking round, I at last perceived, lying almost prostrate before an altar in one of the side chapels, an old man with hoary hair hanging on the shoulders. My heart began to beat violently as I felt sure I recognised the figure. His frame was shaken every now and then by a convulsive movement, and groans burst from his lips. There was a priest moving from altar to altar; at last he approached the chapel where the old man was kneeling. He went up and touched him, speaking some words of consolation, it appeared to me. The man lifted his head, and I saw what I expected—the haggard features of him I took to be Sancha's father.

I trembled. The opportunity seemed given to my hand, but was I equal to the task? I buried my face in my hands, praying; praying for strength; praying that the faintness I felt coming over me, might not overpower me till my task was done. There was some risk from the man's frenzy, but not there; and I determined to speak to him before he left the church.

After the priest had spoken to him, Folcado—if it were he—rose feebly to his feet; and taking up his hat that he had thrown on the floor of the chapel, he muttered some words, and then tottered towards the door; the priest watching him with eyes full of compassion. I liked the look of the padre's face, and would have preferred to have spoken

to him first, and to have asked his aid, but there was no time. I rose from my seat, and followed the old man quickly; I tried to speak—to make myself heard, but my tongue seemed to cleave to my mouth. I went up to him and touched him on the arm. He started round, at the light touch, and I saw his hand grasp something in his bosom. Did he think for the moment it was his daughter? Involuntarily, I recoiled a step, but when he saw the fair-haired English stranger, the fiery light died out of his eyes, and with native courtesy he raised his hat, and stood as if awaiting my commands.

"Pardon me," I said. "Am I speaking to the Senhor Folcado?"

The man looked at me narrowly, but apparently saw no cause for alarm. "*A vossa servizia*," he replied.

"I have something to say to you," I went on with difficulty. "Something of great importance." I saw him quiver all over as the forest tree shivers at the breath of the coming storm. "I want to speak to you about your daughter—about Sancha."

Then the passion of the man's nature blazed forth again. He threw up his arms with that wild gesture I had noticed the day before, and a torrent of fearful imprecations burst from his lips; I felt turning white and weak all over, while I listened. The priest was still standing watching; he drew a step nearer; I beckoned him to approach.

"Tell him," I said. "He will attend to you. Tell him it is all a mistake; that his daughter is as innocent as the first day when she was laid in his arms—that——." But, as I spoke, the pavement on which we were standing appeared to heave up and down; objects were spinning round, and then a sudden darkness came down upon me, and I lost consciousness.

On recovering my senses, I was first aware of a delicious coolness and fragrance, and opening my eyes, I saw round me what seemed to be ghosts. I was not yet able to make any effort, but closed my eyes again, still dizzy and confused. A gentle voice spoke to me, and once more looking up, I saw a kindly face looking down upon me, and white hands holding a glass to my lips. I drank a few drops of cordial, and felt revived.

"*Coitadinha!*" It must have been the hot sun," said another voice.

Gradually I became aware that I was in the guest-room of the nunnery adjoining the church, in the kind hands of the good sisters, who, on their side, were not a little pleased to have something to chatter over and make much of. They tended and petted me as if I had been a sick child, and brought me conserves and iced sangaria, asking innumerable questions, till at last one of the elders interfered and desired that I should be left to rest. A bell ringing loudly at that moment, they all trooped off like a flock of benevolent magpies, leaving me with the mistress of the novices.

Under the salutary influence of rest and refreshment, my senses soon returned to me; and at the same time the remembrance flashed across me that I had left my mission only half accomplished. Should Folcado have again disappeared, what was to be done? How was he to be communicated with? The greatest comfort was, that he would at present scarcely dare to show himself much about the streets openly, while the Baron remained in a precarious state; so there was the less danger that he would find Sancha. I had wished so ardently to persuade him of her innocence and to restore father and daughter to each other! and now what was I to do? There was just a chance that he might not yet have left the church. I rose from the couch where I had been laid. "I must go," I said.

"Go?" almost screamed the good sister, "and you no more fit to stand alone than an infant! When the Senhora has to go, her servant is waiting, and will bring a segè to take her home."

"You are very kind," I said. "I owe you much; but you do not know;" and I endeavoured to rise to my feet.

"But the padre Anselmo; he says he has a message for you—you will at any rate see the padre?"

"A message? that altered the case. Yes; I should be glad to see the padre;" and I sank down on the couch again. In truth I was scarcely able to stand.

Sister Eulalia—I did not then know her name, but learned it in subsequent visits to the convent—rang a hand-bell, and then went to the door, where she spoke a few words to a lay sister. In a few minutes the priest I had seen in the church entered.

"Do not be afraid," he said, in answer to my look of anxious inquiry. "The old man is safe; he will do no further harm; too much harm I am afraid he has done already. Tell me about his daughter—you may trust me; he has done so."

I did trust him. I was thankful to have some one to whom I could speak about Sancha, for I felt doubtful of my own powers, and there was no one at home who would have cared to interfere. I told the priest the whole story and where Sancha was to be found; he promised to see her, and also promised that Folcado should not be made aware of her place of refuge, till he was fully persuaded of the falseness of Donna Camilla's accusation.

For some days, perhaps a week, I do not remember much. Mr. Martin—the English doctor I have mentioned before, was sent for. He pronounced the illness to be a slight sunstroke, and I was ordered to remain perfectly quiet. I knew I ought to be anxious about something, but did not seem to have sense enough either to feel or to think. By the time I was able to sit up, and take cognizance of what was passing round me, I heard good news. The Baron was pronounced out of danger. His life had hung by a thread for some days,

but now Mr. Martin considered him safe ; though it would necessarily be long before health and strength returned.

Then my thoughts wandered once more to Sancha ; what could she have thought of my apparent neglect ? Had Padre Anselmo accomplished his purpose ? how was I to ascertain ? The following day I was to be allowed to go downstairs, and then I resolved to write to the priest, and send Manoel with the note to the church of Nossa Senhora do Cabo : I knew not where else to find him.

I was more weak and dizzy than I expected when I reached the drawing-room, and could only lean back and rest. It was evening before I got my note written. It was about eight o'clock ; the lamps were lighted, but unable to employ myself, I had retired behind a window-curtain, and shaded from the light in the room was looking out at the stars.

Manoel came into the room, looking round. I threw back the curtain, as I supposed he was looking for me. He came up and spoke in a low voice, so as not to be heard by the others. There was some one in the dining-room wanting to see *Minina*.

"Who was it ?"

Manoel could not tell ; an old man—a *vinhador*, apparently, and a young lady ; they gave no name, but said they wanted to see *Minina*, and would not be denied. Would I see them ? or should he send them away ?

"By no means," I said. I would go to them. I crossed the corridor, and opening the dining-room door, saw Folcado standing before me, and beside him a slight figure closely veiled.

I uttered an exclamation of pleasure ; it was a real joy to me to see them, for in the veiled figure I had no difficulty in recognising Sancha. Senhor Folcado came forward and raised my hand to his lips, with the grace of an old courtier, showering all sorts of blessings and good wishes upon me ; and then Sancha threw herself into my arms.

"It is all your doing !" she cried. "I should never have been happy again, but for you !"

I did not in the least see the occasion for such an exuberant display of gratitude, but it was very pleasant, nevertheless. No steps had been taken to arrest Folcado, and, now the Baron was recovering, the matter would be hushed up. Donna Camilla would not care to have the part she had taken in the affair dragged before the light ; and Dom Duarte would certainly not prosecute Sancha's father. Folcado felt no contrition for what he had done ; but as he had acted from a mistaken idea, was glad the young man was recovering. I suppose if Dom Duarte had believed himself to have been injured in a similar way, he would also have revenged himself, only in all probability he would have had resort to the more chivalrous duello.

I could scarcely understand how it was that Sancha looked so bright

and happy, even though secure once more in her father's love. There was the parting from her lover still ; and it was difficult to me to conceive how she could feel joyous, when she was going away, perhaps for ever, from the place where Dom Duarte dwelt. When she put her arms around my neck in bidding me Good bye, she whispered in my ear ; " I know he loves me, he will not forget me ! "

Blessed in this happy confidence of youth she was going away. " God grant you may be happy ! " was all I said, and then we parted.

It was at the great Exhibition of 1862 ; I was resting on a bench near the central fountain, dreamily watching the ever changing, ever moving crowd, when I saw a gentleman and lady approach whom I thought I recognised. They stood a moment by the basin of the fountain. I was not mistaken, it was the Baron Tejal, and his companion was Sancha. I went up to them and spoke ; they exclaimed with delight ; Sancha in her impulsive way embraced me, and Dom Duarte held out his hand, English fashion.

" Allow me to introduce you to my wife," he said.

Sancha blushed and smiled, drawing close to his side, lovingly, and he looked down upon her with such pride and tenderness as did me good to behold in this work-a-day world. I saw the Baron and Baroness several times during their stay in London, and had an opportunity of hearing all about themselves and old friends.

When we left Lisbon, Dom Duarte was still an invalid ; but immediately upon his recovery he hastened to Busilhas to ask Sancha of her father. There was no ill-feeling between the two men ; Dom Duarte confessed to me that he thought he should have done the same, had he believed that any one had injured Sancha.

Donna Camilla vacated the palacio Tejal on her brother's marriage, and retired to a house of her own near the Campo Lide. Lady Ashurst was at Malta ; Miss Ashurst had married the Captain of Her Majesty's ship, *Atalanta*, an elderly widower with six children ; and was established in that island while her husband was cruising in the Mediterranean.

Sancho wondered how I could like to live in cold, foggy England ; where there was no blue sky and so little sunshine. Would I not go back to Lisbon ? My heart said Yes ; but cruel fate said No. Ah, well ! some must laugh while others weep ; it is the way of the world. Perhaps to those to whom happiness is denied, strength is given to bear the burden of sorrow ; we shall know the reason why these things are so, one day, I suppose ; and in the meantime—we can trust.

DAPHNE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE WHITE ROSE OF CHAYLEIGH."

I.

LOVED of gods and loved of mortal, Daphne, by what magic pow'r
Did you draw all brightness to you, as the sunshine draws the flow'r?
Was it that resistless beauty was your glorious woman's dow'r?

When you lay at listless leisure by the sparkling river's side,
Dreaming sweetly the long noon-day in your careless girlhood's pride;
Letting drift your maiden-fancies with the motion of the tide;

Did the rippling wavelets whisper of the love that gave you birth—
Of the love that wholly vanquished your great goddess-mother, Earth,
When your water-father wooed her in his blithe and buoyant mirth?

Did they murmur softer stories; tell into your list'ning ear
Of a love about you lying, yet unknown, but ever near;
Stirring in your soul emotions strangely swayed by hope and fear?

When you roved beneath the mountains, through Arcadia's shady groves,
Did your cheek flush bright with crimson as you heard the mated doves
Cooing softly to each other of a thousand happy loves?

Did your heart ne'er hint the secret of *her* voice's tender tone,
Who amongst your young companions was the ever-favoured one;
Of her hand's fond clasp; caresses kept for you, and you alone?

We who know the ancient story—how the king of Pisa's heir,
Robed in habit of a huntress, left his princely state and fare,
All for love of Ladon's daughter—forest-maiden, Daphne rare;

Smile to think how he deceived you; how he sought and won your grace
With his gay and courteous bearing and his dainty woman-face;
Joined your train of girl-attendants; laughing followed to the chase.

Ah, you loved him, never guessing all the meaning of your love—
Of his passionate devotion it required no vows to prove—
What it was that woke the feelings he alone had pow'r to move.

All your earlier friendships faded down in Memory's cold abyss,
When this new endearment shrouded your whole life in wondrous bliss,
And you knew the thrilling rapture of his long and burning kiss.

Happy maiden, idly weaving garlands gay of joyous youth ;
Taking all the fairest blossoms, heedless of the gath'ring ruth
Which shall scathe the very sweetest when you find the hidden truth—

Truth that gives the flowers their sweetness ; dyes their petals deepest gold,
Mocking e'en the sun-god's glory as their treasures they unfold ;
Rousing in him envious hatred of his skilful rival bold.

Shall Leucippus, only mortal, dare provoke immortal ire ;
Claim the gift Apollo covets ; cross him in his fond desire ?—
Fanning thus a smould'ring fancy into fierce and quenchless fire.

Who may strive with powers eternal ; who may turn aside his fate ?
Woe to him who rashly rouses one of Jove's proud sons to hate—
Seeks to win the luckless maiden *he* has chosen for his mate !

II.

See, a long, dark stain of crimson carried down old Ladon's stream ;
And their blood-dyed darts of silver flashing out a lurid gleam,
As the ruthless girl-avengers rage where they were wont to dream !

See, a fair but lifeless body, pierced with death-wounds, floating by ;
And a white face, still and ghastly, turned up to th' unpitying sky !
Ah, Leucippus, hapless lover ! did you only love to die ?

Did your mistress then forsake you, or was she without the pow'r
To allay the storm of anger in that dark, disastrous hour,
When, your stratagem discovered, spears fell round you in a show'r ?

Ah, she lost all force of action in the sudden, sweet surprise—
As, in tremulous surrender, heart met heart without disguise,
Answering each other's passion through the pleading of the eyes.

Perfect bliss, but oh, how fleeting ! one glad moment, full and bright ;
Then the darkness closed around you, quenching ev'ry ray of light :—
Your freed soul had passed to Hades, and her noon was lost in night.

III.

Hark ! strange footsteps in the forest. Who is this that passes there ?
Haughty in his god-like presence, and of all the gods most fair,
With his noble face and stature ?—Phœbus of the golden hair.

Hark again !—a voice entreating ; then a loud and frantic cry
Rings out through the woodland shadows to the placid evening sky,
Echo'd back in faintest cadence from the mountains mournfully.

Daphne flies ; Apollo follows :—which shall win that desperate race,
Where the hunter goads his victim like a creature of the chase,
Calling out in her wild terror many a new, unconscious grace ?

On she hurries, panting, breathless ; then looks back with heightened fear,
For her merciless pursuer nearer draws, and yet more near—
He who moved her maids to vengeance ; lost her all that made life dear.

One more effort ! Ah, 'tis useless ! He is close upon her now,
With his eager arms out-stretching ; lordly triumph on his brow :
And her feet have touched the borders where her sire's broad waters flow.

Heav'n defend her ! Shall *he* triumph ; shall *he* gain her for his own
Who beside that very river turned her women's hearts to stone,
And with cruel exultation heard her darling's dying groan ?

No, the gods must needs protect her ; they will hear her urgent cry :
So she calls on them to help her—on the pow'rs of earth and sky ;
And Olympus deigns to listen and to send a swift reply.

IV.

Daphne, Daphne, by the river still you stand, a creature fair ;
Safe from Phœbus' warm caresses ; freed from human life and care ;
Only vowed with drowsy fragrance to perfume the summer air ;

Loved of gods and loved of mortal ; dear to hero and to sage ;
Gracing many a victor's temples ; gilding many a poet's page ;
Sacred to all high achievement ; kingliest crown of every age.

EMMA RHODES.

ON BOARD THE "IMPERIAL."

BY AN AMERICAN LADY.

I SHALL never forget that night, upon the broad, shining waters of the Mississippi! The weary day had gone by, and with the evening shades, revived our flagging spirits, luring us to the pilot-house for social chat and music, spite of the danger lurking among the green leaves and blowing flowers upon the banks.

I well remember the picture as I took it then in my eye. The pilot stood at his wheel, apparently engaged in the management of the *Imperial* as she steamed royally over the flashing waves; but there was a half smile upon his lips, which betrayed a hearty enjoyment of the gay sallies of wit shooting around him. Below us, the water glowed with ruddy gleams of light, such as only can light up the beauties of the Mississippi to sunset radiance. Purple shades crept in with the gold and crimson along the green banks, and the monotonous, yet musical splashing of the waves under the vessel, helped to kindle the romance of our natures beyond the limits of total reticence.

We were a large party, and the little pilot-house was full. The captain sat at my side, holding the guitar which he had brought up from the cabin, with exemplary patience, while the first clerk finished a story he was relating to an officer's pretty young wife opposite. The others listened in amazement, or looked out upon the scene, as best pleased them. When it was ended, a song was called for unanimously.

I did not feel like singing, yet the sweetness of the hour made me obliging. I took the guitar and accompanied myself in a gay little song from "*La Traviata*," which met with such signal success as to seal my doom for the remainder of the evening. Duets, trios, and quartettes followed, and we entered into the spirit of what we sang, after awhile, most heartily. The sun was gone; the night deepened, and the moon rose calm and white over the still earth. Out upon the night, mingled with the rush of the waves, floated the voices, and the woods caught the echoes to send them back faintly, when we swept by a hill in our steady stateliness. By-and-by, I played only, while the others sang, listening with all my soul alive and revelling in sweet sounds—listening till my arms wearied and my fingers fell limp among the strings of the instrument.

"Thank you, miss," came from the pilot, with a deep breath of satisfaction, as the music ceased. "I have passed many a night on this river, and have seen beautiful scenes; but no night has ever been

happier or more beautiful than this. If I never see another, I shall not forget the pleasure this gives me."

Something in his last words struck me as sad, almost prophetic. As we made a curve round a bend in the stream, the moonlight fell full upon his face, and I saw that it was earnest, his dark eyes dreamy and sad. Yet as his glance met mine he smiled cheerily, and again glanced at the guitar.

"It is a little thing to give so much pleasure."

"Our chief pleasures come from little things, often," I said.

"Yes. After all, though, it only speaks through some kindly hand—not of itself. A moment since, it almost brought tears to my eyes. Now it lies mute and lifeless," and he sighed.

Here a merry laugh rang out, and the captain's blue eyes turned roguishly upon the bronzed pilot.

"Romantic and sentimental, as I live! Why, Powell, what has come over you, man? You are not often guilty of such weakness."

"I suppose it's the influence of the company I'm in," answered Mr. Powell, with a laugh.

"To be sure," broke in the pretty little creature opposite, whose soldier husband waited her at Memphis. "You forget, captain, that the lady by your side is a 'Writer.' Ah! we must look out, or the first thing we know, we shall all be in print."

I laughed, perhaps was guilty of a slight blush, but thought to myself that they need not be afraid. Alas! that fair young creature little thought how soon the public prints would take her name and bear it far and wide over the country, or under what mournful circumstances.

"Can you tell stories as well as you write them?" asked the captain, turning to me.

"I do not know. The little ones at home used to think so, when they gathered about me in the twilight."

"They are good critics, and I have a childish fondness for stories myself. Ladies and gentlemen, I vote for a story. What say you? Something impromptu and original."

"Yes, 'a story,' 'a story,'" ran through the group, and I was helpless. It did not please me wholly, to be set up as "entertainer general" to the party, but I had nothing better to do, and the next moment smiled at the momentary feeling of annoyance the request had called up.

"I will gratify you on one condition," I said. "You are to believe what I shall tell you religiously, and at the same time acquit me of any element of superstition in my nature. I shall tell you a very marvellous story, if any at all."

"Oh, of course we will believe you, and not think you a bit superstitious. Marvellous stories are exciting. Pray let us have it at once."

The captain's tone was playfully mocking, but I leaned back in

sober earnestness against the glass of the window, and began without preface, as the little incident drifted to my mind.

"I was quite a young girl when the event occurred which I am going to relate—perhaps not more than ten years of age. Timid I had never been. On the contrary, I was rather rash and fearless than timid. Old stories of 'ghosts' and 'hobgoblins' only made me laugh, while the faintest whispers of a mysterious thing, set me into a search for an *exposé*. I generally inferred that there was a natural cause for everything, which a practical person might easily get at, with a little patience, and it was my delight to unravel mysteries and have a good laugh at the expense of others.

"One night our house was crowded with guests from the country, who had come into our little town to attend a 'protracted meeting,' as it was called there. These 'meetings' generally lasted a week—two, and sometimes three, were added, if the excitement could be kept up—and now every available chamber was brought into use for the guests, until this interesting time should be over.

"I had been promoted from the nursery to a dear little white chamber of my own, but had to give it up to two young girls on this occasion, and share my sister's, lower down the corridor. The door to it opened from the first landing above the main hall, and the light from the hall lamps lighted it brightly; so I was in no hurry to get up-stairs on account of the gas being extinguished above.

"The family, save my mother, were all at church that night. She remained at home to tend a little baby brother who was ill, and as my father was absent, my thoughts constantly turned to her until the excitement in the church completely absorbed my childish interest.

"When it was over I stole away from the others, and as it was but a little distance, ran home and hid myself in the recess of a window, where I sat thinking over the scene and trying to get rid of the doleful sounds of weeping and lamentation which still rang in my ears.

"No one found me out. After awhile they went up stairs, and I could hear the merry little peals of laughter peculiar to young girls when three or four get together, floating down now and then. Gradually all grew still. A servant came and put the lights out in the parlour. Still I sat where I was for some time—till every one except mamma was asleep, indeed; then I stole softly up to my sister Lillie's room.

"As I opened the door a long line of light fell across the carpet. As hers was extinguished, I left the door open in order to see where to put my dress when I disrobed, and sprang thoughtlessly into bed without closing it. Lillie was tired and slept well. She had not heard me, as I moved about softly, and just as I was going to lay my head upon the pillow I bethought me of the door.

"'Pshaw,' I said, and a little flash of annoyance came over me. 'I

have left the door open and must get up again to close it. What a silly little girl !

"One more moment and I should have been upon the floor, had not an object attracted my attention, which prevented the quick movement I contemplated. A large cat came upon the threshold, crossed the bar of light, and stood out in the darkness of the room. I then perceived that the creature had innumerable eyes, at which I gazed steadily in wonder, but with no thought of fear. I even laughed a little hushed, amused laugh at the 'funny Tommy' which had so suddenly made its appearance. I could remember no cat in the neighbourhood so large as this one, certainly none with so many eyes ; and while I was puzzling myself over it the thing disappeared as quick as it came, though it did not go out at the door.

"As I went to the door to close it, I heard the sharp cry of my little pet brother from mamma's chamber on the first floor. She had let the nurse go home that night, and with the thought that she might want assistance with the sick child I went below. I found her sitting in a large chair hushing Neddie to sleep again when I entered. I told her what I came for, and sat down beside the grate, in which a pleasant little fire glowed brightly. Pretty soon Neddie was deposited upon his bed, and mamma drew her chair nearer the grate. She seemed wearied and sad, scarcely noticing my presence as she rocked herself to and fro gently.

"While I sat watching the flickering light upon her pale, sweet face the soft, distinct pat of little feet fell upon my ears. I turned my head involuntarily, and saw the great cat spring from the lower stair through the open door, and walk directly toward me. As it passed, I noticed that the colour was gray, barred with black stripes round the body. Brushing against my side as it passed, the creature walked up to the wall, turned around, and lifting itself upon its feet, rabbit fashion, seemed to brace its back against the marble most determinedly.

"Filled with wonder and amazement, I took up the poker and touched it. To my astonishment it resisted me like a stuffed figure, without life or motion. A cry of surprise and consternation burst from my lips.

"Mamma ! see what a strange cat ! I saw it up stairs some time ago. Now it is here. Just take the poker and see what an odd thing it is."

"Mechanically she took the poker into her hand and touched it, an amused smile upon her lips. But the same instant a shade of surprise passed over her features, and she bent an earnest look upon it which doubly excited my wonder. My mother was no timid, visionary woman, but earnest, sound, and practical. I could trust her face as I trusted God's beautiful sunshine, as an indication of genial Nature's blessings and good will to man ; therefore, her swiftly changing features told me of alarm as well as surprise.

"In a moment she checked herself suddenly, and leaned back in her chair.

"Child, go to bed! Why do you sit up so late? I ought at once to have sent you back, for you should have been asleep two hours ago."

"But the cat?" I said persistently. "Isn't it queer?"

"Queer! what can there be in a cat that can be called 'queer?' My child, go to bed and trouble yourself no more about such silly things."

"I obeyed her from a habit never to hesitate in this—always to me pleasant—duty. I loved my mother* fondly, and her word was law. But as I went up stairs it occurred to me that she sent me off merely to prevent my growing excited over a really mysterious thing. She had always taken pains to root all fear and superstition from our natures. I had often heard her say that nothing could pain her more than to see a child of hers growing up a coward, either morally or physically.

I had not more than reached the chamber before that strange thing—cat, or whatever it might be—was beside me. I heard it pat, pat, pat up the staircase, and then it touched my garments as it passed. You may not believe me, but I closed the door and went to bed, absorbed in thought of my strange visitor, but not at all frightened. Once or twice I looked out of my nest to catch the gleam of those kindling eyes, but it was gone—at least it was not visible to me.

"On the following morning, I, of course, told the story to the others of the family, and got well laughed at for my pains. A vivid imagination had always been imputed to me, and in the face of all my fearlessness and freedom from superstition, they would insist upon it that I had been 'deep in some of my wild Legends from the German, and that my imagination had played me a trick upon the strength of them.' Expostulations were vain; they only laughed the more. In despair I appealed to mamma, but she only shook her head, and smiled. Thus beset, I became proudly silent, till on the succeeding night, when the same 'vision' appeared to me. At the first glance I started up in bed, and called out to Lillie. 'I had not expected to see it again, and the sight rejoiced me, as I thought it would prove that all was not attributable to my 'Legends' and my 'imagination.'

"My sister half rose upon her elbow, eager and trembling, but saw nothing, and fell back laughingly. I continued to talk fast, and try to point it out, until I grew excited and angry. She would not look, but only laughed the more, while I sat there in bed, looked at the strange, twinkling, perplexing eyes, and wept with vexation.

"From that time forth my 'Ghost' was the pet joke of the household. I heard nothing else. They twitted me about it from morning till night, and usually my greeting upon leaving the room was, 'Well,

how's your ghost? Are his lordship's eyes as numerous and bright as ever?' Whereupon I would close my lips in proud disdain, and keep my own counsel. It came every night, invariably. No matter if the doors were shut or not. If I fell asleep without a glance from the bright eyes, I was sure to wake before morning and see them somewhere in the room. But what was strangest of all, those eyes disappeared one by one, till only a single orb remained. Suddenly, while I gazed at that, sparks seemed to fly from the outer circle of the fiery globe, and continued until it was gone, and there was no more to be seen. That was the last visit I ever received from the mysterious cat, and ends my story."

A little storm of applause followed the effort I had made, mingled with merry laughter and jesting. Only the pilot was serious enough to ask if anything strange happened after that in the family.

"Neddie died," I answered with a great sob swelling suddenly in my throat, at the pain recalled by his loss. "After that, my beautiful mother, whom we laid to sleep beside him ere the grass covered the little grave that held so much of our hope and joy. But if I talk this way you will think I *am* superstitious: so we will have something pleasanter. Though I acknowledge myself powerless to solve the mystery of my cat's visits, I still insist that there must have been a natural cause for this singular occurrence, and will not think of it, save to amuse myself and others. Suppose, friends, we go down to the cabin, and have a game of whist or chess."

The proposition was accepted readily, and the party descended the stairs merrily. In leaving, Mr. Powell detained me to say good-bye, and express his thanks. A depth and earnestness in his voice thrilled me as he held my hand for an instant in his hard, rough palm.

"Thank you for your music and your story, miss. When you are sleeping, I shall remember, as I drift along the stream, how kindly you have tried to amuse us, and it will help me to pass the lonely night. It will be lonely, for I am very unaccountably depressed this evening. I am not often sad, seldom foreboding."

"But are both to-night, I see. I dare say it arises only from the sweet, soft beauty of the night, and the dangers that lurk among those fragrant thickets we may pass. There are many dangerous places."

"Yes, we can't tell when a pack of those soulless guerillas may pour a volley of shot and shell into us. But I am used to that now, and scarcely think it troubles me. Don't let me detain you longer. Good night, and God bless you."

A smile was upon my lips as I went below, for I was really amused at what seemed mere sentiment. Still, when I had time to think of it more, it impressed me to a restlessness I could not overcome. We played a game of whist after going to the cabin, then separated for the night. It may have been only fancy, but I thought that there was

more of earnestness than usual in our leave-takings, more of kindly interest and feeling expressed than on any other occasion. The gentlemen each shook hands with us, and the ladies left kisses upon each other's lips before entering their state-rooms. The pretty little wife of the young officer waiting at Memphis came up to me with a sweet, childlike manner that won my heart at once, putting her arms round my neck, and leaning a bright little head with a wealth of glossy tresses against my bosom.

"It makes me sorry to say good-night," she said, with a soft little laugh. "I'm sure I don't know why. Perhaps it's only because I've been so happy this evening, and am not sleepy now. Besides, you know we shall get to Memphis to-morrow, and I may never see any of you again. This is the curse of travel. All the nice friends we meet, drift away from us, and that is the last we know of them, nine cases out of ten."

"You will find a good substitute for all you have met on this trip," I smilingly said, looking down at her till the quick blood leaped to her cheeks in crimson spots, and a glad light beamed from the blue eyes.

"Yes," softly and tenderly. "I shall find my own dear husband." Tone and words said: "All my world," in the frank utterance.

When she was sweetly sleeping hours later, I still sat inside of my state room door, but looking through it and out into the calm night. I could not sleep, and my restless wakefulness made me inexpressibly sad. The thousands of stars beaming from a clear sky above, were but as pitying eyes bent upon the earth, now the scene of contention and war such as history had never recorded. I was thinking of the many desolated homes; the many crushed hearts whose hopes had gone out with the red tide of warm young blood upon many battle-fields. Even that river, could it yield up its secrets, would tell tales of sorrow and bereavement almost surpassing credulity.

A sudden grating sound made me look out towards the shore. The *Imperial* had landed for wood, and in a moment more, the crew had planted a blazing torch upon the lower deck, by the light of which they worked sturdily till the huge pile of dry hickory had diminished.

Leaning over the guards, I watched the rough, uncouth figures as they passed between me and the ruddy light, thoughts of that strange, wild scene in the "Fire-worshippers" passing through my mind. While I looked, a splash in the water just beneath me, called my attention to the spot, and I saw the figure of a man lift itself from the water to the deck. It might have been one of the crew, who had taken an impromptu bath; but it did not seem quite likely. There was a cautiousness and silence in his movements suspicious, to say the least, and he had glided from sight too quickly to satisfy me that all was right. All my restlessness had gone in a moment. Ideas and visions floated

away. There was necessity for immediate action, and I went straight to the stewardess to waken and send her to the captain.

Contrary to my expectation, she was sleepy and cross, uttering a prompt refusal to be "bothered with timid, white-folks's whims." So I went away, resolved to find the captain myself, and tell him what I had seen.

The *Imperial* was under way again, when I went out upon the guards. With steady clang the ponderous wheels began to move, propelling us swiftly down the stream. In a few moments the captain passed up the guards to ascend to his room in the Texas, and as he neared me I accosted him with my brief story. He listened with attention, and went immediately below to institute a search; but nothing being found, he soon came back, smiled a little at what he evidently considered my womanly timidity, and bidding me good night a second time, bowed himself into obscurity.

The prescience of coming evil grew strong upon me—so strong that I was angry at the seeming indifference displayed by the captain. The sentinel still paced upon the lower-deck, and the whole crew was there. Still I was dissatisfied, and sat down upon the side of my berth in thought. That evil was near, I *felt* rather than feared. But the shape did not define itself in my mind. Speculation did not avail me in rendering the matter any clearer, as the hours sped by, and I should at length have retired, endeavouring to forget my restlessness, had not a singular odour penetrated my state-room just as I rose to disrobe.

Softly unclosing my door, I looked out and saw a thick cloud of smoke rising along the side of the *Imperial* from the lower deck. That instant I knew that the vessel was on fire, but even then, paused to assure myself. By leaning over the guards, I could faintly see, through the smoke, a red glare, and a line of flame leaping along a quantity of hay which was stowed away in large bales on deck. Near these were some barrels of oil, which I remembered to have seen when visiting the machinery below, and this had taken fire. Though I had not paused the space of a minute, the terrible element was making rapid leaps toward the cabin, while the confusion on deck had become awful. The men shouted hoarsely, while the horses plunged in mad fright, screaming with almost human voices in their agony.

I have always thanked God for presence of mind during moments of danger, and it was not denied me in that awful time. In less than a minute I had thrust my purse into my bosom, dropped all superfluous portions of dress, and taken off my shoes. The next thing was to tie on a life preserver which hung by my berth, and then to run to the other state-rooms. I knew by the commotion that the inmates had been awakened, and it was now my purpose, having prepared myself, to aid them all in my power.

The scene which met my gaze in the next moment beggars descrip-

tion. The state-rooms were vacated, the inmates rushing out into the cabin, pallid with fright, and giving vent to such screams as never before greeted my ears. The fatal truth had spread already, and the word "fire" quivered upon every lip. The gentlemen had rushed out also, without dressing, save in their pantaloons; and many were as feeble and helpless in their fright as the ladies. I saw at once that little help could be expected from them.

"Friends," I cried earnestly, "try to calm yourselves for a moment and act. Let each lady tie about herself the life preserver in her room. Do not try to save any baggage or articles of dress. Life is worth more than all these, and we must take to the water. Be quick, and do it without confusion. I will help you."

Some obeyed readily; others fell helpless to the floor, while a few rushed about wildly, screaming, not knowing which way to go. Amidst the clamour and confusion, I made myself understood sufficiently to give direction to their movements.

"Go to the stern of the boat, and stand still. The fire is nearer the bow, and you cannot escape forward, even if they succeed in running in to the shore. Those who cannot swim will have to be taken off in the boats. But for your lives do not rush about so confusedly. You expose yourselves to the danger you would avoid."

All now burst through the door, and I hastened to find Mrs. Nelson, the officer's wife, whom I had missed in the excitement. She was lying upon the floor of her room in a deep swoon. To seize a life preserver, tie it round her waist, and then dash water from a basin in her face, was the work of a minute. She gasped, started up, and looked at me wildly.

"Be quiet," I said, assuredly as I could. "We are in danger, but a little care may save us all. I can swim, and with this life preserver on, you cannot sink, so if we get into the water, as we must, I will help you to the shore. Only be calm, and do not let fright unnerve you."

She clung to me like a child, while I half carried, half led her out.

But what folly to hope for reason in a moment like that! With all their efforts they could not run the ponderous vessel ashore, before the whole of the lower deck was enveloped in flames, now leaping in great red tongues along the guards, till the heat scorched us. The boats had been cast to the water, and one man, braver and steadier than the others, seemed to have taken into his hands the management of them. The captain, in despair of saving us by other means, had by this time made his way back to the stern of the vessel, and began to lower the ladies into the boats.

The first two loads went ashore safely, but as the fire roared nearer, the people grew more mad and rash, leaping into the water headlong. Holding Mrs. Nelson by the hand to keep her back, I saw them go down—rise, sink again, and rise struggling. Some struck out for the

shore: others went down to rise not again, swallowed up by the waves, now lashed into billows by the rocking of the vessel. Suddenly, with a wild plunge, Mrs. Nelson escaped my grasp, and leaped down to the water. I saw the flutter of her white night-robe for a moment, then followed her. My heart was in it. I thought of the waiting husband at Memphis, and for his sake resolved to save her if it was in human power. Yet, as I rose to the surface of the water, I could scarcely buffet the strength of the troubled waves, and it was a minute before I saw her. She had risen a second time, and quite near me. The force of the water drove her under, but could not keep her there with the life-preserver on, and I took courage. By a few strokes I reached the little white form, and bore her up with one hand.

A glad cry burst from her white lips, now vividly lighted up by the burning steamer. Her eager, wild eyes were fixed upon me with a look I can never forget. Both little hands grasped me like a vice.

"Don't do that," I gasped. "Let go, and trust yourself to me. We are near the shore, and the current is not strong. You must lie still—I will swim out with you. But if you do not obey I must let you go, or both will be drowned."

With a still more frightened look, she released me, resigning herself to my care. I would have died to save her then, in her childlike beauty and helplessness. With one hand I kept hold of her, floating her along as I swam, and slowly neared the bank. It was laborious work, but the glimpses I caught of her sweet, white face, nerved me afresh, and gave new impetus to my motions. Six yards more would have landed me safely, when a long black object drifted directly across us. I could see that it was ponderous, but could not tell what it was. The end struck Mrs. Nelson's temple with a dull, heavy sound, driving her against me forcibly; but, with the quick instinct of self-preservation, I dived beneath, bearing her down with me. We rose beyond by a little more than a yard, and a few more strokes brought me to the land.

Fortunately, the steep bank at that point had been worn down in ruts, and afforded me a species of steps by which I endeavoured to mount to the level earth. Mrs. Nelson was a dead weight, and, wearied with the double effort of swimming and taking care of her, it was a minute before I could recover strength to proceed, and rested myself upon the end of a log lying on the edge of the water. I thought my charge had fainted, and just there a shadow concealed her face from me. But as soon as I could get breath fairly, I took her arms, and placed them round my neck, clambered up the bank. Then I was so intent upon success, I scarcely heeded the weight of the tiny figure which I held with one hand, while assisting myself with the other.

A moment's hard labour brought me to a place of safety, and I laid my burden down upon a little grass-plat. The flames rose high and fiercely now, and the water was still full of the struggling passengers.

The captain had leaped from the guards, and I saw him swimming toward me, a figure held above water by one arm. But all seemed to have been rescued from the steamer. Not even one of the crew was left. All had leaped to the water and made for the shore. With a great sigh of relief, I bent down over Mrs. Nelson.

There was no sign of life. The pale face was uplifted, every feature lighted up by the glare from the fated *Imperial*. A second glance showed me an ugly black mark upon the temple, where that thing had struck her, extending back under the hair. A second close examination struck a chill to my heart. I felt her pulse: it was still. In my very arms, so near to safety that my heart had beat with grateful thanks, she had been smitten dead in an instant!

I could not help it then. All the pent-up feeling which I had resolutely locked within my own bosom burst forth now, and on my knees beside her I sobbed bitterly. I had done all I could—exhausted my strength to save this one, and in the last moment failed. Now, with bowed head, I heard, as in a confused dream, the roar of the flames—the cries of the people—the lashing and hissing of the water as the flaming objects fell into it. I only raised my head when a more fearful excitement broke forth, and a look at the burning steamer revealed to my startled gaze the pilot, Mr. Powell, standing still at his post, now powerless to help himself. He had laboured to the last vainly trying to land the steamer, but, deserted by all the others, found it impossible to accomplish his purpose. Now he stood with wistful eyes, looking down from his perch, while the smoke and flame curled round him.

"Jump into the river, Powell!" shouted the captain, who had just landed, pantingly. But the advice was vain. There was no path left by which he could reach the side of the boat without rushing into the fire itself, and the next moment he was hidden from sight.

At this moment the steamer trembled violently—gave a great leap forward, and scattered thousands of burning fragments into the air. The boilers had exploded.

I cannot dwell upon the horrors of that night longer. Just at day-dawn, those left of us were taken on board another steamer bound for Memphis, and I had Mrs. Nelson conveyed to my room that I might take her to her husband. An hour or two would bring us to that point, and I knew that I was able to do this much for him at least.

Others of the dead formed the complete list on that sad passage. A dozen and more lay sheeted upon the deck—the stiff outlines of their figures showing through the white folds chillingly.

When we landed at Memphis, there was a rush on board from the wharf, and then—oh, what a scene! I could not bear to witness it. In my room, with that little figure laid out upon the berth where I had composed her in that last sleep, I sat down and waited until a hand fell on the door, and a pallid face shone in upon me. I knew whose it

was. He was searching for her, and with one fearful groan fell upon his knees at her side as I pointed to the bed. I had heard her describe him, and his captain's uniform confirmed the impression in the moment he came, of his identity as her husband.

Gently I drew the sheet from her face, then slipped from the room through the door opening upon the guards. I heard his sobs—deep, fearful, heartbreaking—as I stood outside, and the tears ran down my cheeks like rain. It seemed then as if my heart must break.

Later, he came to thank me for what I had done; but it only added to the pain I suffered. I am afraid I felt rebellious, and ill disposed to acknowledge the blessing of the life spared to myself.

Those that followed were sad days at Memphis. Some were buried in a strange land, others taken home. Some were so badly burned that they died soon after, while a few suffered for weeks ere they recovered. Mrs. Nelson was buried there, and I thought with agony, as I saw the loving husband bending speechlessly over her grave, of the different meeting she had anticipated. Poor little wife! Poor husband!

When, a few months later, I heard that Captain Nelson had fallen before Vicksburg, I was glad of it. It seemed a merciful shot which reunited them in eternity, and I knew that it was best. What happiness is there in life when the heart is utterly bereaved?

It was, doubtless, a guerilla who had succeeded in secreting himself on board the *Imperial* and destroyed her. But the truth has never been ascertained fully.

